

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Mark 7:14-23 *And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." ¹⁶ ¹⁷ And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸ And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."*

In our current times, we are perhaps more conscious of germs than ever before. We've grown accustomed to wearing masks when necessary, using hand sanitizer frequently, and just generally keeping our distance from one another. There are lots of germs out there, and we can never be sure of where we're going to encounter them, so it's best to just play it safe.

The cognizance of germs surrounding us in this world ought to be a good reminder to us of the other evils that surround us in this world. Just as there are many germ-y places out there, there are a lot of evil places around as well. We're surrounded by sinful ideas and images and activities which we get exposed to every single day. As a general rule of thumb, it's best to keep your distance, to do what you can to avoid such things.

However, even the most sinful and corrupt place on this earth is nothing when compared to something that exists inside you: that's your own heart. Jesus tells us in our text, "**For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder,**" and all the rest. "**All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.**" So while it's good practice for Christians to try to avoid those things which might tempt us to sin, the number one generator of sinfulness and evil in this world, you carry with you wherever you go.

Now, masks, hand sanitizer, washing your hands for 20 seconds—these all have varying degrees of effectiveness when it comes to keeping germs at bay and avoiding illness. Of course, you can't stop everything. But when it comes to that sin production facility that exists inside you, there's actually nothing that you can do. Nothing that YOU can do, I said. Because there is a solution out there. In the words of our theme:

Jesus is the Solution for our Hearts' Pollution

- I. Defiled from the inside out
- II. Cleansed from the outside in

Just before our text today, Jesus had been having a conflict with the Pharisees, as often happened. Of all things to be discussing, the two parties were arguing about handwashing. Or at least that's what it seemed like on the surface. The Pharisees were concerned that Jesus' disciples weren't washing their hands before eating. Now, this wasn't just motherly concern that the Pharisees were displaying. The real heart of the issue was the debate over what makes a person acceptable before God. In other words, what, in God's eyes, determined whether a person was sinless or sinful, clean or unclean,

saved or damned. And the Pharisees belief was that by merely going through the external ceremonial motions of the many man-made laws which they concocted, they would be acceptable in God's sight. They had many such laws. There were the Sabbath laws about what types of activities they could and could not perform, even how many steps they were allowed to take on the Sabbath Day. They were very zealous in watching what types of foods they would eat, never would they consume something that they considered "unclean." And they even had rules about handwashing, which was, again, what the argument was over in our text. The thought was that when you were out and about in the marketplace, you were bound to come into contact with something that was unclean—not unclean as we think about it with germs and dirt, but ceremonially unclean. And so the washing didn't need to be a thorough scrubbing, but even just a simple sprinkling of water would suffice in taking care of that ceremonial uncleanness. Clearly, they weren't worried about the spread of germs or bacteria, it was all just an external religious display. They thought that by doing these things, they were effectively making themselves holy, that God would be pleased with them because of their diligent service.

And that is why Jesus argues against this handwashing. Not because He was opposed to good hygiene, but because He was opposed to that pharisaic notion of self-righteousness. That's why he said, **"Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him."** So the external things like washing their hands, and even what kinds of foods they ate—Jesus said that none of these things make you holy or unholy. All of those things have no affect on your soul's eternal destination.

Now, there are Christian churches here in our own backyard that still hold to these principles, arguing that there are foods and drinks that Christians *have to* avoid if they're really Christian. Some churches forbid any consumption of alcohol. Certainly, alcohol can be abused, and, as Christians, we should avoid that, but there's nothing wrong with alcohol in and of itself. Jesus Himself drank alcohol with His disciples in the form of wine. Then there are other churches that forbid the eating of meat on Fridays during lent. And those rules are so convoluted that they've become non-sensical. For instance, eating the meat of fish is allowed as an exception to the rule. I even read recently that capybara meat is also approved during lent, as the Vatican ruled that capybaras could be considered fish since the animals spent a good deal of time in the water. (And capybaras are not fish at all, they're actually the world's largest rodent.) Jesus responded to these types of convoluted man-made laws in the lead-up to our text, when He said, **"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."** (Mark 7:6-7) And then as a good blanket summary, He said again in our text, **"There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him."**

Well, we don't belong to that type of church, so maybe it sounds like Jesus isn't addressing any of the concerns within our own midst. But He really does, as He continues in verse 18, **"Whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him"** . . . and skipping to verse 20 . . . **"What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."** Understand then what Jesus is saying and what it means for you. The full principle is this: You can't be made sinful and condemned to hell because of the things that are outside of you. The *reason* you are sinful and deserving condemnation to hell is because of what's inside of you. There's nothing we can do to avoid that.

How often we want to take the position that it's actually things *outside* of us that make us sinful. Like when we as men make the argument that, "It's because women dress the way they do, it's impossible

not to look!” That’s just another form of the “devil made me do it” argument, pointing to something outside of you as causing you to sin. But this is just one example of **“these evil things [which] come from within.”** Or, what about “I wouldn’t have lashed out if they hadn’t started it first!” Again, another example of **“these evil things [which] come from within.”** Or even, “No, I haven’t forgiven them yet, but they haven’t said they’re sorry! I’ll forgive them when they say they’re sorry first.” **“All these evil things come from within.”** When you’ve fallen into sin, you can’t point the blame to something outside of you, you can only point within. Even if our sin is in response to another sin, the only thing we can blame is our own sinful hearts.

Our hearts are evil. The root of all sin in our lives, whether we perceive it to be retaliatory or not, it actually comes from that weapon of mass sin that exists within us—our own hearts. Clearly, we need to get right with God somehow. But we’re powerless to do so. After all, if we were to try to stop sinning to make right with God, we’d have to rip out our own hearts! Because we are **defiled from the inside out**. Your heart is evil, my heart is evil, just as the Pharisees’ hearts were evil. So let’s listen to Jesus’ words with the Pharisees. We need another solution, and Jesus offers to do the cleaning.

Speaking of cleaning, there’s a widely recognized principle of chemistry called, “Imbesi’s Law of the Conservation of Filth.” It states that, for something to become clean, something else must become dirty. You can clean the dust off a bookshelf, but you had to dirty a rag to do so. You can sweep the kitchen floor, but now the broom is that much dirtier for it. There’s no way to clean something without making something else dirty. That’s the way we’d often like to take care of our sin. Pointing the blame elsewhere or simply not fessing up to our crimes so that someone else has to take the fall. Our name might be clean, but someone else’s name had to be dirtied in the process. Well, Jesus would like us to know that there is a way for a person to get completely clean while leaving nothing behind that is dirty and corrupt. There is a way for this total cleansing, but there’s only one method. It’s Jesus, the one who **cleanses you from the outside in**.

Going back to verse 14 in our text, Jesus points to His solution for you. He says, **“Hear me, all of you, and understand.”** Now, that doesn’t sound like much of a solution on the surface. But diagnosing the problem with these Pharisees and with us, what does He point our attention to? To His Word, to what He has to say on the matter. If you recall our Old Testament reading from this morning, God had said, **“You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.”** Those commandments which God had commanded the Children of Israel, where He forbade the eating of certain foods, not working on the Sabbath—God had instituted those laws. He had done so to set His people apart from the rest of the world. He wanted them to remain a people separate from other gods so that they wouldn’t be distracted from Him and His saving Word.

And that’s why God commanded, **“You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it.”** Because if we take out the parts that we don’t like, or we add extra commands and customs in **“teaching as doctrines the commandments of men,”** it’s not God’s Word any longer, is it? It’s man’s word. And that’s where the Pharisees had gone wrong. In their effort to keep these commandments from God, they added to the Word and missed the whole point of God’s lesson to them.

So let’s not fall into the same trap, and instead hold that Word even before our own opinions. In that Word, we see that God’s will, even in the Old Testament times, was to save sinners. His point in keeping the Children of Israel separate through all these commandments was to show them that they were special to Him. In the many various ceremonial laws, they would have their hearts and minds pointed forward to that Savior that would eventually come and save them from their faithlessness.

Looking to that Word, we find the same for ourselves. There we find a Savior who brought the cleansing solution for our hearts. He alone could clean that which is entirely corrupt, because He was entirely clean. Never with an unclean thought, word, or action. Then He went to the cross, switched places with you and declared you to be clean. He declared that you are the one with the clean heart, and He became the evil one. He took that mass production facility of evil that operates within you and took the blame for it. When He was scourged and bloodied, you were scrubbed clean. When He died, you were declared “not guilty.” When He arose from the grave, the promise that this was an effective solution for you was guaranteed.

And now, we don't have to try to cover anything up. We don't have to try to pass the blame of our sin onto others. We don't have to make excuses. Instead, we can confess our sins openly and honestly. We can admit that our hearts are evil and the root of all sin which flows out from us. We can do so, because there is no sin for which Christ has not died, no evil within you that Christ's blood is not able to cleanse. After all, we have God's own Word that declares it. **“The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.”** (1 John 1:7) Can God really mean *all* sin? Yes, even the secret sins that lie so heavily on your conscience. Even the evil within your heart that has left such a stain on your conscience that it seems it will never be gone. Jesus has cleansed it all.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he writes, **“Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God.”** (1 Corinthians 6: 9-10) Remember that list of evil that emanates from our hearts? This is pretty similar to that list, and Paul says with God's authority that these evil things coming from your heart disqualify you from heaven! But then Paul goes on, **“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”** (1 Corinthians 6:11) Jesus is the solution for your heart's pollution. He has cleansed you from the outside in. And when Jesus cleans you, there's no mess left behind.

In a minute or so, we're going to sing the words of Psalm 51, which we read for our Introit today. **“Create in me a clean heart, O God.”** When King David wrote those words, he had come to the same realization that we have arrived at, that his heart was sinful, and that he stood condemned because of it. He had written that Psalm after the whole mess with committing adultery with Bathsheba and killing Uriah her husband to cover it up. Now, he realized he could not cover it up, he could not pass off the blame on anyone else. He knew there was only one who could cleanse him of His guilt. His Savior God, the same one who declared to him through Nathan the Prophet, **“The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.”** (2 Samuel 12:13) Beautiful words of comfort to cleanse a guilty conscience.

With that in mind, what a fitting Psalm for us to sing after the sermon each week! For when we listen to the Word of Christ, we stand exposed for the sin which dwells in us. But powerless as we are to overcome our own sinful nature, Jesus has become our solution. He's cleansed us entirely, and He doesn't need our help to do it. He's cleansed us from the outside in, doing a thorough job, leaving nothing behind. Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.

Pastor Sam Rodebaugh
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