

August 29, 2021 – 10:00 am  
14th Sunday after Pentecost



“Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate, rather the things that come out of a person contaminate the person”

**St. John United Church of Christ**  
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Rev. Rosemary Captain

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: Come to listen for all God Seeks to teach us.  
God has given us birth by the word of truth.

**MANY: We are drawn to God as to a beloved.**

**We leap for joy when we know God’s care.**

Every perfect gift comes to us from God. God’s image is a part of each one of us.

**God’s grace has been poured into our lives.**

**Wisdom and understanding are offered to us.**

Who will dwell on God’s holy hill?

Those who walk uprightly and speak the truth.

**We will honor God by honoring our neighbors.**

**We will act toward them as we wish to be treated.**

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

Our hearts overflow with longings too great for words, gracious God. You have so good to us, yet we are dissatisfied. We have many things to enjoy, but seldom have we found our home with you. Meet us here to anoint us with the oil of gladness. Awaken us with singing and speak your truth to draw us away from the lure of wickedness. May this time of worship help us to become a wise and understanding people, eager to live as the body of Christ, making a difference in the world as Jesus did so long ago, on the Galilean shore. Amen

Let us give God our thanksgiving and praise.

**\*GLORIA: NCH 759**

Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit,  
Three-in-One; As it was in the beginning, is now,  
and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

**\*GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23**

**7** The Pharisees and some legal experts from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. <sup>2</sup>They saw some of his disciples eating food with unclean hands. (They were eating without first ritually purifying their hands through washing. <sup>3</sup>The Pharisees and all the Jews don't eat without first washing their hands carefully. This is a way of observing the rules handed down by the elders. <sup>4</sup>Upon returning from the marketplace, they don't eat without first immersing themselves. They observe many other rules that have been handed down, such as the washing of cups, jugs, pans, and sleeping mats.) <sup>5</sup>So the Pharisees and legal experts asked Jesus, "Why are your disciples not living according to the rules handed down by the elders but instead eat food with ritually unclean hands?"

<sup>6</sup>He replied, "Isaiah really knew what he was talking about when he prophesied about you hypocrites. He wrote, *This people honors me with their lips,*

*but their hearts are far away from me.*  
<sup>7</sup>*Their worship of me is empty*  
*since they teach instructions that are human words.*

<sup>8</sup>You ignore God's commandment while holding on to rules created by humans and handed down to you."

<sup>14</sup>Then Jesus called the crowd again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand. <sup>15</sup>Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God's sight; rather,

the things that come out of a person contaminate the person."

<sup>21</sup>"It's from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come: sexual sins, thefts, murders, <sup>22</sup>adultery, greed, evil actions, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, insults, arrogance, and foolishness. <sup>23</sup>All these evil things come from the inside and contaminate a person in God's sight."

These are the Words of God.  
They are true and can be trusted.  
**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**MESSAGE: "What is more important – tradition or morality?"**

It seems like the Pharisees are always looking for something to discredit Jesus and his disciples. This time the accusations has to do with the disciples eating without washing their hands.

First of all, what rule or tradition are the pharisees complaining about? Nothing in the Old Testament requires lay people to ritually wash their hands before eating. The Pharisees attribute this practice to the tradition of the elders; that is, to the Pharisees' oral tradition rather than to the written law.

Because ritual washing was required of priests, pious Jews had begun to adopt the habit, on the principle of a passage from Exodus 19:6 which reads "you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Since the text says that all Jews are priests, all Jews should perform the ritual washing; that's how the Pharisees interpreted the text.

Jesus also knew the scripture from the Torah and he responded to the Pharisees with a quote from Isaiah 29:13. Repeating verses 6-7 Jesus replied, "Isaiah really knew what he was talking about when he prophesied about you hypocrites." Isaiah wrote "this people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. Their worship of me is empty since they teach instruction that are human words."

Where did these ideas of pious behavior come from? From the dawn of time, it has been assumed that it is right and proper to honor the gods or God, by the performance of various acts of piety, including prayers, sacrifices, and the observance of specified taboos. It was assumed, of course, that such piety could win the favor of the gods and secure desired blessings. Religion that focuses on piety, however, is apt to treat ethics as a subordinate or extraneous concern.

The prophets, such as Isaiah, vigorously attacked this view of religion, insisting that God was above all else a moral God and that the proper worship of God requires ethical living. In this scripture passage, Jesus is strongly affirming this prophetic perspective.

Hosea 6:6 is another example of a prophet sharing this teaching. "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." My favorite is from Isaiah 1:11 where the prophet writes "no more of your bulls" or something like that.

Now, in this message, Jesus is trying to point out what is really important to God. It has nothing to do with clean hands. It has everything to do with clean hearts.

The Pharisees were the best at acting pious, thinking they were better than anyone else. They had fancy clothes and walked around with their noses in the air, I imagine. When anyone has their nose in the air, they can not see the starving, and sick people at their feet. They step right over them not realizing that those people are God's children, too. They miss seeing God in their midst.

In verse 8 Jesus states to the Pharisees, "you abandon the commandments of God and hold to human traditions." In other words, the Pharisees are missing the point altogether. They need to ask themselves, "Why is washing hands important?" Does it have anything to do with the love of God?

We must be careful that we don't get stuck with traditions that may no longer be pertinent or useful in searching for God's purpose to us in the world. When we follow any tradition, we need to examine it and ourselves to find the purpose for the tradition. In verse 21, Jesus says "it's from the inside from the human hearts, that evil thoughts come."

In God's sight what is in our hearts is the most important thing; morals, ethics, compassion, love. We can wash our hands with soap and water, but how do we wash our hearts? It starts with our confessions of failure and with what's at the communion table.

#### **PASTORAL PRAYER:** Beginning with Silent Prayer

Thank you, God, for giving us Jesus. Without him we would be lost. Jesus brings the good news of the gospel to us each and every day and we are so grateful. We are grateful for his love and compassion for all of us.

Jesus gives us forgiveness and grace as we strive to discover the true purpose of everything we think and do. We study the words and actions of Jesus and pray for guidance to be more like him. As humans we miss the mark many times, but we get back up and try again. We pray for your help in our endeavors.

We pray for all those in your world, dear God; especially those who are struggling searching for water, food, and safety as rebels and governments fight for what they think is important. Dear God, help all those in charge of others, that they may govern with charity and clarity. We lift up all those on our prayer list as we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us . . .

#### **THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as, we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

#### **OFFERING OF GIFTS, TITHES AND SELVES:**

Let us not forget that the bounty we enjoy is only loaned to us for a little while, to be managed to the glory of God. Every generous act of giving is prompted by God's own generosity toward us. We are invited to return the first fruits of our labors that, through the outreach of our church, God may accomplish much good for those who most need to know that someone cares.

#### **\*UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**

**Our hearts overflow with thanksgiving for all the bounty you entrust to our stewardship, O God of light. You have reached into the shadows, where we often flee, to rescue us and give us your work to do. Bless our offering of self and substance, we pray. Amen.**

**\*BENEDICTION:** God offers to each of us deep inner cleansing. We can become whole people, unstained by the world. God's Word transforms all who hear and heed it. God blesses those who are doers of the Word. God anoints us with the oil of gladness. Our hearts overflow with God's good gifts. Amen.

**PRAYER LIST:** Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Joe Knapp, Jim Garrett, Agnes Doctolero, Julie Walker, David Seneczyn, Cathy Ganschinetz, Rosemary Williams, Warren Neff, Jack Harris, Jackie Canterbury, Sherry Hackbarth, Doris Moody, Pastor Rosemary Captain.