

August 30 2015 Year B Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Newport United Church of Christ

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 34

James 1:17-27

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Sermon *Hearts Versus Lips*

I read something from out of the past about The War on Christianity. Jesus in the view of the scribes and Pharsees, I think, could be seen as raging a war against from Judaism, in the passage that we read this morning in view of those in religious authority. Because it wasn't the Gentiles, it wasn't the unbelievers that were trying to trip Jesus up. It wasn't them who were trying to challenge his teachings or to side track his ministry instead it was those religious leaders that religious establishment of that day, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, teachers of the law, and priests, in other words, it was people like you and people like me. To them Jesus was a threat to their belief; he was a threat to their authority over the people even their very livelihood was threatened by Jesus. You remember for example how he upset the apple cart when he turned over those tables of the money changers in the temple court on toward the end of his life. So it comes as no surprise then that the scribes and the Pharisees started nit-picking as Jesus' disciples for not ritually washing their hands before they ate. It was one more opportunity to undermine Jesus' authority as a teacher; one more opportunity to undermine Jesus as the leader of the people.

It reminds me I was listening to Marv as we walked into the sanctuary of a trip that I remembered as a child of a trip to my Aunt, Maxine's house in Walla Walla. She was my father's oldest sister and in fact she is still living today up in her 80s. You would never say that my Aunt Maxine ran a friendly operation but you would say she ran a tight ship including oatmeal for breakfast for every single morning. I don't think I had ever eaten oatmeal until I arrived at her house. That first morning of the visit, she noticed something that I had not properly washed my hands with soap before coming to the breakfast table so she promptly turned me around and sent me back into the bathroom and made me wash my hands properly with soap and water before I could eat my breakfast. A breakfast that I wasn't exactly thrilled about eating in the first place because I really wanted sugared cereal that morning.

Now when Jesus overlooked his disciples hand washing he certainly didn't do that so he could tick the Pharisees off. Although you might imagine Jesus might have had some fun doing that from time to time. I think his purpose instead is well explained in his response to those religious leaders from this quote from Isaiah He

basically called all those folks, hypocrites that is people who say or believe one thing but act out something different. Secondly he reminds them hand washing is not exactly at the center of God's major concern for human beings in the world. Third he drives home the point with his listeners that most of what we encounter in God's creation can be used in one way or another for good or for ill. What comes into our lives is not nearly as important as what goes out from our lives, what comes out of our lives is what each of us makes of it. You have a choice as to whether it is going to be for good or for ill in the world. I don't know about you, but I see the same story played out around me almost every day times and time again. You and I and many other people, who call themselves Christians in the world around us, as I see it, completely forget the point of what our faith is all about. We are focusing on concrete things, petty things, material things, the external things, and when all is said and done are unimportant aspects of church life and faith. While all of these things are important or even central to the mission of our lives and faith to show God's love in the world around us is what our mission is. The mission often gets lost in the midst of all these things. I remember how stressed in one worship committee in one of my churches was something that we called I wish card. As far as I was concerned they were a scourge on the Christian faith. Someone got the idea to put the cards in the pew I Wish XYZ on them. We got all kinds of interesting things that people wished for. Raise your hand if you are in the choir by the way. You naughty people, one wish cards said, you should never wear a turtle neck that shows beyond the choir robe because that distracts some people's worship. It is something that should be really focused upon as we consider our Christian faith. Now don't get me started. We had a children's choir which was a delighted when they were able to perform in church services. What do people do when kids sing? They clap. My goodness you would have thought that was the end of the world. Children should not get their adulation from God for their performing; they should wait until they get to heaven when they get positive feedback that they need. And this went on and on. The bad news is how often we get these things wrong in our lives of faith by putting some silly stumbling block in the way of some hungry or hurting soul.

The good news I always like to leave you with the good news is that sometimes we do get these things right. We remember our priorities. We remember what our priorities are --treating others with love, respect, and kindness and that is what this journey of faith is all about. So I am going to encourage you today as Jesus would, I think from this passage, I am going to encourage you as you go out, to do it right this week because Jesus is counting on each one of us to be his ambassadors of love in the world around us in the things we say and in the things that we do and the way we act in the world. But one word for poor old Maxine before you go out into the world, be sure to wash your hands. And together we say Amen.