

Lutheran Church of the Master
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor
August 29/30, 2009
13th Sunday after Pentecost

“Gathered Around the Word: Anyone Left Standing?”

Mark 7

Clean and Unclean (Portions **highlighted** omitted from the reading in this Pericope)

¹The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and ²saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed. ³(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.

⁵So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?"

⁶He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

" 'These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

⁷They worship me in vain;

their teachings are but rules taught by men.' ⁸You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."

⁹And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe^[a] your own traditions! ¹⁰For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,'^[d] and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'^[e] ¹¹But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), ¹²then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. ¹³Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

¹⁴Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.

¹⁵Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'

¹⁷After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable.

¹⁸"Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? ¹⁹For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

²⁰He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' ²¹For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²²greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' "

(This page is a translation of verses 20-23.)

ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΡΚΟΝ 7:21-23 (1881 Westcott-Hort New Testament)

²¹εσωθεν γαρ εκ της καρδιας των ανθρωπων
From within For out of the heart of men

οι διαλογισμοι οι κακοι εκπορευονται
the thoughts of evil pass out

πορνειαι whoredom - prostitution
fornications

κλοπαι (kleptomaniac)
thefts

φονοι killing, slaughter, murder
murders

²²μοιχειαι adultery
Adulteries

πλεονεξιαι an inordinate desire of riches
greedy desires a scheme of extortion

πονηριαι evil disposition of mind – wicked deeds - villainies
iniquities

δολος bait or contrivance for entrapping – fraud – deceit – guile
deceit

ασελγεια outrageous behavior
lustful desires

οφθαλμος πονηρος
an eye wicked

βλασφημια calumny -- railing – reproach
blasphemy

υπερηφανια haughtiness
pride

αφροσυνη foolishness – levity – wickedness – impiety
foolishness

²³παντα ταυτα τα πονηρα εσωθεν εκπορευεται και κοινοι τον ανθρωπον
All these evil things from within pass out and profane the man

Remember a couple months ago, when we had that Sunday when the Worship & Music Team wanted to say thanks to everyone who had participated in worship? You might remember that during the weeks before that Sunday, as one of my interns used to say, some of you got your shorts in a knot because “why aren’t they going to say thanks to me? Remember what happened? Mike asked group after group to stand up ... and by the time it was done, everyone was standing because that last group asked to stand was “anyone who is in church now”?

Well, let’s pretend we are doing that now ... except in **reverse**.

Let’s pretend that Jesus is present in our midst right now (**well, actually, he is**)

And let’s pretend we’re talking about who is:

	clean	and who is	unclean ...
maybe you’d prefer who is	good	and	bad ...
or maybe you’d prefer who is	saved	and	not saved?

So let’s pretend that Jesus starts the conversation (because he does in this text) by saying:

Everybody in the house who is clean/good/saved stand up ... you’all stand up!

(Well, here, today ... I’m not really asking you to, so just stay seated) ...

And then he starts telling some of us to sit down:

If you’ve ever had evil thoughts ... sit down.

If you’ve ever stolen something (taken something that isn’t yours) ... sit down.

If you’ve ever killed someone ... sit down.

If you’ve ever committed adultery ... sit down.

If you’ve ever had an inordinate desire of riches ... sit down.

If you’ve ever done something wicked or been wicked ... sit down.

If you’ve ever been deceitful ... sit down.

If you’ve ever behaved outrageously ... sit down.

If you’ve ever looked at something with a wicked eye ... sit down.

If you’ve ever done something reproachful ... sit down.

If you’ve ever been puffed up with pride ... sit down.

If you’ve ever acted foolishly with impiety ... sit down.

Ah, in case some of us are still standing, Jesus could say what he said elsewhere ...

“Well consider:

... in Matthew 5: ²¹“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder,^[a] and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother^[b] will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,^[c] is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

... and again in Matthew 5: concerning Adultery ²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'^[a] ²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

... and again, in Matthew 5, concerning Divorce ³¹"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'^[b] ³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

... and again in Matthew 12: ³⁰"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. ³¹And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³²Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Is anyone still standing? If so, we could consider Jesus' words in other passages like:

Well, how about

... his put down of the pietists of his day in Mark 7: ⁶He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

" 'These people honor me with their lips,

but their hearts are far from me.

⁷They worship me in vain;

their teachings are but rules taught by men.' ⁸You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."

... or his put down of the Sadducees ... the worship committee of the Jewish community, in John 4: ¹⁹"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

... or how about his rejection of Old Testament law in John 8:

⁴and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

¹¹"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

The point is, that 1 John 1:8 is still true: ⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

And, the point of today's Gospel reading is that ... not one of us is "clean" or "good" or "saved" on the merits of what we have done.

On the merits of what we have done, not one of us is left standing.

That is what the Law does to us ...

Actually, to refer to classic Lutheran terminology ... the Law does three things:

- (1) **The First Use of the Law** is that it serves as a curb, checking the coarse outbreak of sin ... as the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord says: "1. Not only to the end that external discipline and decency are maintained by it against wild, disobedient men;
- (2) **The Second Use of the Law** serves as a mirror ... showing the sinner his/her sin. Like today's Gospel reading. It does this, the Formula of Concord says, "2. That through it men are brought to a knowledge of their sins."

You see the law is like a **microscope** focused inward magnifying all the evil atoms within us and bringing them into view ... and magnifies what is hidden ... it reveals our shortcomings ... it separates us from each other ... is condemns as guilty ... it imprisons us ... it sets us against each other ... it causes us to make judgments about each other. The Law draws lines to separate us from each other.

As Bishop Hanson said at last week's Churchwide Assembly, it leaves us no option but to kneel together at the foot of the Cross of Jesus Christ and say with one voice, "Lord, have mercy on me. Lord, have mercy on us."

But there is, according to classic Lutheran terminology, a **Third Use of the Law. The Formula of Concord** says: "but also that, when they have been born anew by the Spirit of God, converted to the Lord, and thus the veil of Moses has been lifted from them, they live and walk in the law ... but having been liberated and made free from the curse of the Law, yet they should daily exercise themselves in the Law of the Lord ... it shows us how we may serve God out of gratitude ... or, **to put it in my words: "since we don't have to do it to earn God's favor, because God already loves us ... now we can do it to show God that we love Him."**

The good thing about being a Christian is that we are not "**People of the Book.**" We do not worship the Bible ... neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament. We worship Jesus ... and we know that the Bible is primarily **the manger in which the Baby Jesus is laid** ... the Old Testament **set the stage** for his arrival ... and the New Testament **became the platform upon which the Church of Jesus Christ ... the Body of Christ ... has been established.** It is the words of Jesus ... not the periods and proof texts of Scripture ... that serious interpretation of the Bible seeks to proclaim.

And Jesus is often the one who said, "You have heard it said (through the words of what we call the Old Testament) ... but ... I say to you."

We always read Scripture through the **Christ experience** ... which is why the weekly celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus on Sunday trumped the Old Testament mandate to worship on the Sabbath.

We realize that there is a difference between **what was timely and what is timeless** ... so we don't follow the Old Testament's prohibition against eating pork in **Leviticus 11** ...

We certainly do not follow the command in **Deuteronomy 21:17-21** that says "if a man has a stubborn or rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town ... then all the men of his town shall stone him to death."

We certainly have disregarded Paul's admonition in **1 Corinthians 14:33-35** that "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."

Not to mention these words from **1 Timothy 2**: ⁹I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

¹¹A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

¹⁵But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Proof texting is fine if you are interpreting the Law. If I were a rabbi, that would be my task. But I'm not a rabbi ... I'm a pastor ... and I'm convicted by and convinced by the Gospel of Jesus Christ ... and my task is to proclaim Jesus and the Good News that he always brings ... in order that you and I might follow Jesus.

And Love is the only focus if we are seeking to follow Jesus. Instead of drawing lines to separate, love erases the lines in order to welcome and invite. Love is like the **telescope** looking further and further out in order to find one lost sheep, one lost coin, one wandering brother or sister, the neglected widows or orphans, the voiceless, the hopeless, the disenfranchised.

Remember Mark 12:28-31:

²⁸One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

²⁹"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'^[a] ³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'^[b] ³¹The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'^[c] There is no commandment greater than these."

I saw Jesus at work two weeks ago ... he was at the **Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** ... he was empowering our Presiding Bishop to give faithful balance leadership to our deliberations ... and **I believe Jesus was working through the serious and often heated conversation and debate of that Assembly**. Jesus was, like the father in the Parable of the Two Sons in Luke 15, welcoming his one son home and hoping that his other son would welcome his brother too.

Jesus was, like the sower of the seed in Mark 4, throwing the seed all over the place with almost reckless abandon.

I am thankful to be a member in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America which has, through the power of the Holy Spirit, been called to seek for justice for all of God's children.

I am grateful to have been able to vote in favor of a Social Statement that says that this Church is concerned about life's most personal and intimate relationships of human sexuality. I would ask you not to criticize it or get upset about it if you haven't first of all read it. Don't assume for a minute that the preacher on WMBI or the writer in the **Herald** or **Tribune** has read it. I have copies of it in my office and it is online ... I think if you read it, your concerns just might be turned into awareness and appreciation.

I am thankful to be a part of a church that cares enough about humanity to fund millions of dollars for malaria eradication along with the United Nations ... and millions more to fight HIV/AIDS locally and globally.

I am grateful that God has revealed to us and through us the concept of "**Bound Conscience**" which holds us together even though there are major disagreements among us. Like "**The Two Kingdoms**" of Martin Luther and our Lutheran "**Real Presence**" understanding of the Eucharist which sets us apart from all other Christian denominations yet links us to the Body of Christ ... these things provide the framework that enable us to do **GOD'S WORK** – through **OUR HANDS**. Bound conscience requires that even though I believe **this**, knowing that you believe **that** obligates me to honor your position. It isn't a matter of "majority rules" ... it is all about Jesus Christ taking up residence in my life and in your life.

It is partly in this sense of "Bound Conscience" that I share what follows. What follows is, first of all, the message that I believe God has laid upon my heart for today ... so I cannot keep from sharing it. But I know that it is also a response to the questions that so many of you have during this past week concerning my participation in the Churchwide Assembly the previous week.

I could wish that we were in a different setting ... perhaps in the fellowship area sitting on couches in small groups with a cup of coffee in hand ... so that we could have mutual conversation. And I hope conversations will continue ... I only

ask that such conversations be based on faith and facts rather than feelings, fear, or frustrations. While I believe God is compelling me to share where my faith has lead me ... I am equally committed to honor where your faith has lead you.

I am grateful that the Reformation blew up the concept of Papal Authority and did not invest that same term in an understanding of our Clergy. As a pastor I have committed myself to live an exemplary life ... but really, my example is no greater than yours ... because it is all based in the waters of our baptism ... and you must be an example in your place of work just as I must be here. And so we are here together in worship today ... in light of the Gospel not one of us standing on his or her own merits before Jesus ... but each and all of us kneeling at the foot of the cross asking "Lord, have mercy."

It is interesting how sometimes something new "**HERE**" can affect something older "**THERE**." One of the questions that have been asked during the past weeks is "**what is the sign of a committed relationship?**" We're asking it now about same sex committed relationships ... but should this same question not also be applied to heterosexual relationships as well.

Do you know what is the current divorce rate in America?

It is frequently reported that the [divorce](#) rate in America is 50%. This data is not accurately correct, however, it is reasonably close to actual. The Americans for Divorce Reform estimates that "Probably, 40 or possibly even 50 percent of marriages will end in divorce if current trends continue" which is actually a projection.

Do you know that, according to enrichment journal, the divorce rate in America: for a first marriage is 41%; for a second marriage is 60%; and for a third marriage is 73%?

Doesn't that make you wonder if a majority of those getting married understand what **commitment** is?

And how often is it not true that, as my mother often cautioned, "**remember sometimes what we think we know might not be so**"

I grew up in a predominantly Norwegian and Danish church ... we had a hard time accepting German Lutherans because they drank beer, danced, played cards, and went to the casino. That was a totally unacceptable life style to us.

When I was in confirmation, my home pastor was asked not to preach on the Parable at the Wedding in Cana because **everyone knew** that the Bible says that Jesus didn't want us to drink wine.

We knew that Roman Catholics were on the fast track to hell (and there was no stopping at Purgatory either because we knew that the Bible says that it doesn't exist);

We knew that members of the Masonic Lodge and Eastern Star were on the same fast track to hell as the Roman Catholics;

We weren't even sure about the Swedes because one of our congregations wrote about its founding "as we charter this church, there are 98 souls, 3 Swedes, and 1 German."

We knew that women should keep quiet in church, so they weren't elected to the Council (but of course, Sunday School and Choir didn't count ... so we gave that up to women entirely and always tried to find some men)... and when the proposal to ordain women came in the mid-1960's, the proof texts abounded and people threatened to leave that American Lutheran Church;

We knew that Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, was the last real Christian school standing because it didn't allow dancing on campus;

We knew that Jews probably deserved what they received ... and it wasn't until college that I found the joy of worship in a synagogue and started to know who my Jewish friends are so that now many of my closest friends worship in Hebrew and some of them are very kosher.

I'm grateful that the ebb and flow of God's Grace has, with its baptismal waters, removed all of these lines of division drawn by human hands in the sand of time.

I'm grateful that God is at work erasing the lines of division through the hands of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We have lead the way to full communion with the Episcopal Church, Moravian Church, United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Church USA, Reformed Church in America, and now the United Methodist Church.

Now globally and locally we're taking on malaria, HIV/AIDS, justice for women, and we continue to be a leader in world hunger eradication.

I wonder what line of division God's heavenly eraser is going to go to next? Personally, I can't wait to find out!

Perhaps through what our Church has decided in Minneapolis in 2009 we will all realize how much we call need to meet at the foot of the cross and pray together, ***"Lord, have mercy on us ... and thank you that you do!"***

(a footnote about ELCA Social Statements)

How the ELCA makes policy on particular social issues

Social statements are social policy documents, adopted by an ELCA Churchwide Assembly, addressing significant social issues. They provide an analysis and interpretation of an issue, set forth basic theological and ethical perspectives related to it, and offer guidance for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, its individual members, and its affiliated agencies and institutions. They are the product of extensive and inclusive deliberation within this church. Since 1991, the ELCA has adopted nine social statements.

This church shall develop social statements...that will guide the life of this church as an institution and inform the conscience of its members in the spirit of Christian liberty.

The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective, p. 9

Previous ELCA Social Statements

[Abortion](#)

[Church in Society](#)

[Death Penalty](#)

[Economic Life](#)

[Education](#)

[Environment](#)

[Health & Healthcare](#)

[Peace](#)

[Race, Ethnicity, & Culture](#)

For more information, go to <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements.aspx>