

Written Copy: Mark 7:18-20 "Cleansed from Defilement Within"

14th Sunday @ Pentecost: Proper 17

Sunday, August 28th, 2021

Text: Mark 7:18-20

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.

Exegetical Statement

Jesus is continuing His response to the scribes and Pharisees charge that His Disciples make themselves unworthy of God's gracious reign and rule because they don't follow their tradition of washing. After explaining how their man-made tradition violates God's commandments instead of moving the doer to fulfill them, He now reveals where defiling sin really comes from. It doesn't come from outside a man, what he eats or whether or not he washes. The sin that defiles and makes one unworthy to be in God's kingdom is found in the person's heart. It is the work of the sinful Adam that is focused on pleasing oneself and ruling my own heart rather than submitting to the rule of God. Even eating non-Kosher foods does not, in itself bring defilement into the body. That food passes through the digestive tract and into the toilet. The sin of eating non-kosher foods was disobedience to God's command in the heart. Because Jesus had come to fulfill the law and now bring together Jew and Gentile into one Church, under the new Covenant that He would make is His blood keeping Kosher was no longer a requirement. Christ fulfilled all the requirements in His life, death, and resurrection that would keep us out of God's Kingdom of grace.

Focus Statement:

Jesus came to win the victory over our sinful hearts by refusing every temptation to sin. He lived the perfect life that we could not and died the death that our sinful nature earned for us. He grants us that victory He won on the cross and by the empty tomb through baptismal faith. He is at work through the means of grace to slowly trim away the power and control the sinful nature has over us.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We can and should put on the spiritual armor of God to protect us as we live out our lives in the world. But while this can protect us from attacks by Satan and the world, there is the enemy that lurks within: our old sinful Adam that propagates the sinful thoughts, words, and actions within us.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Through the repentance the Holy Spirit works in the means of grace work with Him to put to death the sinful nature by choosing godly obedience, and asking forgiveness when we fail, believing that our slate has been wiped clean.

Subject Sentence: Jesus came to clean out the defilement within us

Introduction: Defiling Myself at A Day Out with Thomas

Yesterday, for her 3rd birthday, we took my granddaughter Nora to see her current favorite person: Thomas the Tank Engine. For those of you who are unfamiliar with him, he is the starring character of what was originally a PBS show for kids called “Shining Time Station.” It was drawn from stories written by a pastor who used them to teach moral lessons to children. It is live action model animation, using small model trains with Claymation faces that make them appear to talk and have human expressions.

Well, a life-size Thomas the Tank Engine came to Huckleberry Railroad this past weekend, and Nora got to ride on the train pulled by him. She was very excited to go, and so were we. We were running late and got there just in time for us to board the train. Hurrying, I forgot my mask in the car. As we were boarding the train, I noticed on the doors a sign that said, “Masks required”. But, as I looked around, it seemed that a majority of those getting on board were not wearing any masks. The ticket takers and the conductors didn’t say anything about putting on a mask. And I knew that if I went back to the car to get mine, I would miss the ride completely. So, I got on board with the family and sat down without my mask.

Everything was fine until the elderly lady sitting in front of me noticed Susan and I, as well as my daughter, son-in-law, and my grandkids were not wearing masks. This obviously upset her. She began to talk about how the tickets and the information online said masks were required, yet all these people are not following directions. As I looked into the train car ahead of us, those I could see were not wearing masks. While this may have troubled her a little, the ones that really upset her were my family and me. I heard her say, “If this is going to be how it is I’m going to ask for a refund!” She got up and left the car to talk with the conductor. When she came back, I apologized to her for forgetting my mask and told her I would go ask them if they had any masks to give to us.

The conductor came into the car and before he was able to say anything she demanded a refund. He responded saying to all of us that there was a concern about people not wearing masks, and that he was sorry for not saying anything earlier. He said that things have been changing so much and so quickly in this regard he wasn’t sure what the policy was anymore. He then asked how many needed masks and he brought back some for Susan and I. (Steve and Ginny’s family actually had masks on them). I put my mask on, thinking that this would bring peace to all concerned, but it did not. This lady continued to talk about me in the third person, how rude some people are, not following the rules that are clearly stated, and how she was thinking of seeking a refund anyway since all this had ruined her family’s outing. By the way, none of the rest of her family seemed to be complaining.

I didn't say anything. This was partly because she wasn't directly addressing me. It was also because I couldn't hear all of what she said. But I heard enough to understand I was the hidden subject of her tirade. As a Lutheran Pastor I knew that if I responded vocally to her barbs no good would come from it. In the Women's Bible Study that I've been leading we had just talked about how a soft reply turns away anger, and how some of the wisest decisions a Christian can make is not to respond, but to keep your opinions to yourself. While it appeared that I was being a model Christian in my words and actions, that was not the case regarding my thoughts. I was thinking of all kinds of replies to say to this lady. Things like, "You made your point, now just sit down and shut up. Why don't you just get off the train and get your refund? Or why don't you get up and move to another car, like that one ahead of us, that has more people on board, with more people not wearing masks? Have you never made a mistake? How would you like it if the tables were turned, and you were the offending one? I thought all these things, but I said none of them. So, I avoided sinning yesterday, right? Wrong! I lost the battle to the enemy from within.

Fighting the Enemy Without and Within

In our Epistle Lesson Paul describes how the Devil is always prowling around and ready to attack us. He and his demons are ready to throw flaming darts of temptation and accusation. And he often does this using the sinful unbelieving world that we live in. For this reason, Paul encourages us to daily put on the armor of God that is a gift from Jesus. He says that we are to put on "**The Belt of Truth**" that works to hold all the other pieces of armor together. And that truth is who Jesus is as fully human and yet fully God. He is greater and stronger than anything the world or the devil can throw at me. He says that I am to put on "**The Breastplate of Righteousness**" so that when the devil accuses me of speaking or acting in ways that are not in right standing with God, I am to know that I am covered by Jesus' right standing with God as proved by His perfect sinless life. I am to stand firm wearing on my feet as shoes **The Gospel of Peace** that declares no matter how much the devil might accuse me, I am forgiven by God through Christ Jesus. I am to use my faith in Jesus' promises as **The Shield** that repels Satan's flaming darts of accusations, believing by faith that in Christ I have been completely forgiven. I put on the **Helmet of Salvation** which is the knowledge of all that Christ has done to save me. This knowledge comes from the **Sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God, the Scriptures. This is all well and good to fight the enemy from without, but what about the enemy from within?

What is the enemy from within? It is my sinful heart. It is the Old Adam that loves to please myself and disobey God's commands. Jesus describes the kind of filth that pours out from this sinful nature of mine: **Mark 7:21-22** 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.** Now you may look at Jesus's description of these evil thoughts and think that none of this applies to you. But keep in mind that we sin not just by what we say, or do, but in our thoughts as well. Jesus says that anger in our hearts is viewed by God as the same as murder. Lusting after anyone who is not your spouse is the same as committing adultery. Your desire for those things that you don't possess, especially when that desire takes the place in your heart that should belong only to Jesus is coveting. Gossiping, spreading information about another that may not be true is slander. Thinking about how you could manipulate someone else to do what you want them to do is deceit.

And as for me yesterday; while I didn't say anything that would be regarded as sinful, I was sure thinking it. I had angry thoughts racing across my brain. And while I did try to apologize once, I didn't try to do it again because she had offended my pride. I thought to myself, 'she and her unforgiving attitude was the problem, not me'. And I gained much pleasure when I saw her exit the ride and be visibly uncomfortable by all those other unmasked people surrounding her. I could perhaps dismiss this as just being all her problem. And these thoughts that I had were brought on by her, so that I shouldn't really be responsible for them. But that's not how Jesus would have me act. As His disciple I am to show my love for Him by showing unconditional love for others, even those who are unforgiving and talking behind my back. Now the Armor of God can protect me from temptation from without, but how can I fight this temptation and sin that comes from within, from that sinful nature of mine that is always ready to rise up and move me to disobedience at a moment's notice?

Jesus Came to Clean Out the Defilement

Jesus says in **Mark 7:23** **All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.** I am defiled from within. I left the house yesterday wearing the Armour of God so as to protect myself from responding to the devil's temptations and I ended up succumbing to the defilement from within. Even when I hold back from saying or doing sinful things, I can't seem to guard my thoughts from being infected and defiled by sin. What am I to do? Paul cries out with the answer in **Romans 7:24-25a** ²⁴ **Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** ^{25a} **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!** Jesus has come to clean up all that defiles and pollutes me from within. He has come to make me good enough to reside in His kingdom of grace.

The world is a messy place, and so are our thoughts words and actions. But Jesus never defiled Himself by His thoughts, words, or actions. He always acted in complete loving obedience to His heavenly Father, and with a supernatural unconditional love for His fellow man; for you and for me. He sent His Spirit into your heart and life to clean out all the defiling and polluting garbage that your sinful nature emits. He throws them in the trash and takes them to the cross where by the power of His suffering and death they are incinerated in the fires of hell that He suffered on your behalf and mine. All those things that you have thought, said, and done have been atoned for. They are no longer charged against you.

And just as Christ rose again from the grave, you who are connected to Him through baptism rise daily to a new life. A life whereby the power of His Spirit is at work within you so that the Old Adam, your sinful nature, continues to be knocked down and removed from its place of power. And the new nature, the Christ-like nature is installed in its place. This is the work of the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace. He uses the sword of the Spirit to show you the evidence of the sinful nature's work within you. He applies the work of Christ on the cross to empower you to send all the fruits of that sinful nature to the cross where they are burned up, atoned for. He washes all that defilement from you in the ongoing baptismal washing that is repentance and presents you before the Heavenly Father wearing the clean garment that is the robe of righteousness which comes from Christ. You stand undefiled in His eyes, made good enough to live in His eternal kingdom, declared to be what you could never be on your own. Through the work of Jesus Christ within you, you are declared to be perfect.

Looking at Yesterday with New Eyes of New Nature:

Before I left the house yesterday morning to go see Thomas the Tank Engine, I spent some time in personal devotional meditation on God's Word. In doing so I put on that Armor of God that Jesus offers to each of us by faith. Perhaps that was the reason I didn't respond by sinning with my mouth to the elderly lady that sat in front of me. The Armor of God worked against the temptation to sin that comes from without. But it didn't protect me from the sin that is within. Those sinful thoughts against that lady flew around in my head. But as I reflected on this later on, and in light of this Gospel Lesson, the Lord gave me food for thought. I began to wonder what problems might have been going on in her life. Did she have a close family member who had contracted COVID and was seriously ill? Had she lost a close family member or friend to the disease? Does she care for her grandchildren on a regular basis and is taking precautions so as to not infect them? Or does she lack faith in the LORD who promises to be with us and protect us as we utilize the gifts that He gives us such as masks? Did she not have faith in the Savior who protects those who believe when they encounter situations that are beyond their control? Did the Lord put her there in front of me so I could give a clear Gospel witness? If that was the case, then I failed.

Conclusion

Our Christian life is lived out fighting spiritual battles on two fronts. There are the attacks from outside of us hurled by Satan and his work through the unbelieving world. But there is also the attacks of the sinful nature that still lurks within us. From this nature pour forth sinful disobedient thoughts, words, and actions. In and of ourselves we are powerless to stop this from happening. But we have a Savior who is more than capable of bringing all the work that this sinful nature wants to do to nothing. He forgives all the disobedience this nature puts forth by sending it to the cross where it is destroyed. Even those times when I fail to be His Gospel witness. And He replaces it with a new nature filled with His love and a desire to obey Him instead. There will come a day when that sinful nature is destroyed in us, when our souls are recreated to be perfect along with our bodies on the Last Day. Until that time rest assured that Jesus is working through the means of grace to put down that sinful nature, while He raises back up that new nature you've been given in baptism. He is at work to keep you focused not on sin, but upon Himself and His gift of life everlasting.

Let's give the Holy Spirit a chance right now to do this supernatural work of killing the old sinful self and restoring the new nature we received in Baptism. Let us now confess our sins to God our Father:

O almighty God, merciful Father, I, a poor miserable sinner, with a sinful nature that I cannot control, confess to you all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You, and justly deserve you temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them, and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy, and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor sinful being.

Upon this, your confession, I by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the word announce the grace of God to all of you. And in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen