

August 25, 2024
Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost

“The Priority”

Mark 7:1-13

Folks who criticize organized Christianity sometimes do so by saying, “The church is full of hypocrites.” My favorite response to that is, “Yes, and there’s always room for one more.”

Christians do often look like hypocrites or actors, those who profess one thing with their words, but don’t live it out in their lives. Here we say, sing and pray the sacred and holy, yet we go out into our lives and do the worldly and sinful. While some may indeed be hypocrites, I think most are just struggling in sin and attempting to live lives of faithful repentance, coming here on Sunday not because we paint ourselves as good, but because we recognize we are indeed sinners in desperate need of the forgiveness Christ freely and eagerly gives us.

However, I do think there is a type of hypocrisy as Christians that we may tend to overlook in our busy lives crowded with so many obligations, challenges, callings, messages and distractions all demanding our attention. We can be hypocrites in ordering our priorities in life, and the Pharisees in our Gospel lesson give us a stark example of that.

Immediately prior to our Gospel reading St. Mark told us, *“When [Jesus and the disciples] had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.”*

So Jesus is doing marvelous things, miraculously restoring bits of the broken creation through the healing of many grievously afflicted people...and the Pharisees are griping about the disciples eating with unwashed hands. And when it says “wash” they are talking about ceremonial washings required not according to the Bible, but according to traditions developed by the Pharisees in the last hundred years or so. Talk about misplaced priorities! Jesus in love and mercy is restoring broken lives and proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God, yet the priority to these guys is some man-made detail of a “proper” life.

Jesus rightly let’s them have it with both barrels, using the greedy practice of “Corban”—another man-made rule—to expose their hypocrisy in denying the love and honor God commanded of children for parents. This is one of those places where we mentally cheer Jesus on as He goes after the nasty Pharisees. Yet we suffer from a very similar tendency.

Christ’s work of restoration and healing most certainly didn’t cease when He ascended to the right hand of the Father. Every day we wake up in our Holy Baptism we experience it—the sins of yesterday washed away and forgotten, we arise as a new person to walk before God in holiness and blessedness forever. This is a miraculous work—a damned sinner made holy saint by the power of God; the death and resurrection of the very Son of God!

But what’s the main thing we focus on and ponder? Coffee? What I’m going to wear today? Am I going to be late? Worrying about all the bad news in the world? Getting angry/excited about the political situation in our country? Is our focus all on the family or strained relationships therein?

I’m not saying such things aren’t important—many of them are very important and deal with the very vocations to which God has called us in life. For me, yeah—coffee is important. But where do all these things rank compared to the truth that the God of Creation has loving

regard for you, has redeemed you from sin and death, and that despite yourself you are walking into the day as His holy and beloved child? Does it rank that because of this truth your day is filled with good works He has provided for you to do? Is that kind of stuff anywhere on the radar?

Jesus was miraculously at work with divine healing, and the Pharisees were concerned with earthly hand washing. Jesus is divinely at work in the lives of His people today; are we obsessed instead with the comparatively mundane things of the fallen world? Even to the point we barely give the divine a passing thought most days? It should not be so.

In our discussions, and in our private thoughts for that matter, how much space is filled with our opinion of how things should be, when in fact God in His Word has made rather clear how things actually are? We can get angry and despairing at all the wrongs and brokenness in this life as if God is doing something wrong; yet the wonder for us should be in how God is making it all right again in Christ Jesus.

We come here on Sunday receiving all God's good gifts and praising Him for all His goodness to us. Do we then hypocritically go live life as if He has not made it all good, as if we are not destined for paradise in His glory...living instead as if this broken life is what it's all about? This is a hypocrisy with which we struggle.

Combat this by intentionally, repeatedly and habitually turning away and tuning out the world and focusing in on the top priority in life—salvation from this broken life and the death that accompanies it! Don't see only the mundane of the world; see the divine healing that is happening to you in it! Strive to live in that reality; that joy and love that it may overflow into the rest of the present reality of your life. Pray for the Holy Spirit's work to be mighty in you, that you might rightly hold the priorities of God highest and let all else fall into its proper place behind it.

Christ clearly calls us to such practice of faith: *“Do not be anxious about your life...Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”*

But please, avoid the bigger mistake of the Pharisees here. Their “traditions of men” were made all the worse because it was by such works of obedience, they thought they were making themselves right in God's eyes. Getting your priorities straight according to God is not a work of obedience; it is rightly receiving the Gospel! It is accepting that Jesus Christ's work and the call of the Holy Spirit to saving faith has in fact made you righteous, saved, the beloved and redeemed of God!

In the end, the Christians priority is simply living in the gift, and thus in the joy of the love of Christ forever. Our struggle is to open our eyes and see the wondrous miracle of salvation being lavished upon us each and every day.

The world, yes, it is here, It has it's place as do we in it. But because of Christ we are not of it. We are of the kingdom of God, so wake up each day, rejoice, and live in that kingdom to God's glory.

Amen.