



TOUCH POINT

Breaking Point – TouchPoint for August 25, 2021

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 (NRSV) *Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.)*

So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”

He said to them, “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

*‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines.’*

You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.”

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.” For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Amen.

Grace and peace from the All in whom we live and move and have our being.

In our tradition, the first giving of God’s law comes in the Book of Exodus. We know that Law as the Ten Commandments.

The second giving of God’s law comes in the Book of Deuteronomy. We know this Law as Moses’ final sermon. *“So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.”*

By the time all is said and done, the five books of God’s Law – the Torah – contain 613 Mitzvot, commandments from God. There are governmental laws, judicial laws, moral laws, spiritual laws, and civil laws.

One commandment is to build a three-foot high wall around the roof of your house. That was a good safety law at a time when homes were flat-roofed and roofs were used as living space. Doesn’t make much sense now.

One commandment is that anyone with a physical defect shall not serve in the sanctuary. That law made sense too, in its day. It was believed that physical defects were a sign of God’s disfavor, even of God’s punishment for some sin somewhere in the family line, a sin perhaps going back generations. Of course such people had no place in the sanctuary!

Another law requires the washing of hands before eating a meal at which bread is served. Moses was commanded to make a copper basin and to place it at the entrance to the altar area so that Aaron and his sons could wash their hands before approaching the altar to offer sacrifices. Exodus 30 verse 20 concludes "... and it shall be for them a statute forever."

These are the Laws of God. All 613 of them are, quite literally, biblical.

Enter Jesus.

The keepers of the Law – the Pharisees and Scribes – are keeping close watch:

Who is this Jew drawing a crowd of 5,000 and feeding them with only 5 loaves and two fish and collecting leftovers after?

Who is this Rabbi who eats with sinners and tax collectors, who forgives the sins of a paralyzed man and lets a bleeding woman touch his robe?

Why does this Jew not observe the Sabbath?

Why do this Rabbi's disciples not observe the tradition of hand washing?

For all the good this Jesus is doing, how can any of it be any good if it keeps getting done outside of the Law?

Perhaps WE are among the Pharisees and some of the scribes who travelled all the way from Jerusalem up to Galilee to see this Jesus and to say: What the HELL is going on here?

And Jesus responds by quoting scripture right back at us in the words of Isaiah:

*'This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.'*

"It's biblical," people said about slavery.

"It's biblical," people said about excluding women from ordination.

"It's biblical," people said about refusing the sacrament of marriage to same-sex couples.

Enter Jesus, breaking all kinds of 613 laws and rituals and traditions to fulfill the One Commandment that supersedes all others: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. ... The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."

We all have our breaking points, that point at which law and ritual and tradition must be painstakingly examined and sometimes painfully overturned in order that we might be free to love God with all our heart.

We are not bad people for being like the Pharisees and some of the scribes who made the long walk from Jerusalem to see Jesus in Galilee.

Many of us have a lot on our minds ...

Many of us are struggling to make sense of the things happening in the world and to the people we love ...

Many of us are limping around with broken hearts and we wonder: How did life get so HARD? ...

Many of us are making do with just enough spirit to fake getting by.

Like the Pharisees and some of the scribes, we have made a long journey.

Like them, we might be a little disappointed to learn, at this late stage in life and after this long trek, that some of the biblical formulas we've clung to are wearing thin. Our hearts might be broken, in fact, to realize that you can do just about everything "by the book" and still, really bad things happen to really good people.

Enter Jesus, calling us away from our preoccupation with trying to earn God's favor.

Enter Jesus, calling us back to the heart of God. Calling the weak and the weary, the broken and the disillusioned, the hopeless and the helpless – calling us all.

Listen, he says, leaning close to his disciples on that last night: "I am telling you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is MY commandment: Love one another as I love you."

At our breaking points, when we are most afraid of what we might lose,
may we remember that it is the love of Christ that enters in ...
and that it is his tender mercies that carry us ...
and that it is his grace that is sufficient to this day.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be Still, know that I am God

Creator Spirit, Come

(Keith Duke, Sacred Weave)

Creator Spirit, Come. Renew the face of the earth.

Kindling Spirit, Come. Enflame our waiting hearts.

Anointing Spirit, Come. Pour forth on us anew.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come O Lord and Set Us Free

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother

Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

A Blessing

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Complete Chants Vol.1)

May the Lord bless you.

May the Lord protect you and guide you.

May His strength uphold you.

His light shine upon you.

His peace surround you.

His love enfold you.

May the Lord bless you.

