



9/2/18 Mk. 7:1-8, 14-5, 21-3 & Dt. 4: 1-2, 6-8

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[Mark 7: 1-23](#)

### ENTERING THE SCENE:

Picking up on a theme we last saw in chapter two, the Pharisees and scribes contest the behavior of Jesus' disciples concerning their lack of regard for the laws of ritual cleanliness. This was a particular issue with the Pharisees, whose resistance to the presence of the Roman occupation of Judea took the form of extending to all Judeans the holiness rules originally intended for priests entering the holy places. Elaborate regulations, involving meal customs especially, were intended to assist in maintaining a communal identity under challenge. However, Jesus and his disciples seem to have been famous for their own approach to meals, which conspicuously did not involve observing of such rituals. (Fr. Beck)

### Mk. 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

1 The **Pharisees** and some of the **teachers of the law** who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and 2 saw 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**. 4 When 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. ) 5 So 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?" 6 He 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. 7 They **worship** me in **vain**; their **teachings** are but **rules taught by men**.' 8 You have let go of the **commands of God** and are holding on to the **traditions of men**."

14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 15 Nothing outside a man can make him '**unclean**' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him '**unclean**.'

21 For from **within**, out of men's **hearts**, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these **evils** come from **inside** and make a man '**unclean**.'"

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Jesus warns against making human teachings or traditions superior to God's. Have you ever struggled with this problem?

**PRAYER:** Gracious God, your Son taught me that you are Love. You ask me to respond to your love, by loving You and those You put into my life. Sometimes I get one part of this right at the expense of the other part. Often, it is easier to just do what I am told and not question too much. Yet over and over I have to struggle with what loving asks of me. Help me to remember that most of my evils come from the inside out, not the outside in. Then I won't worship you in vain. Amen.

### WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

**PHARISEES / TEACHERS OF THE LAW / ELDERS:** Jesus is now causing unrest among the leadership of Judaism: so much so that we find them leaving Jerusalem and coming out to the countryside where Jesus was teaching. Ever vigilant, lest Rome become alarmed, these leaders kept close watch on anything or anyone who could upset the delicate balance in place.

*If you had been there that day, would you have become uneasy when you saw these people from Jerusalem? Would you have stayed anyway?*

**UNCLEAN / UNWASHED / WASH:** The entire book of Deuteronomy is concerned with what is clean and unclean. To be clean is to be fit to participate in worship; to be unclean is to be barred from participation until certain rituals of purification were accomplished. The religious elite elevated simple everyday tasks to the same importance as worship in the Temple.

*How would all this attention to details have affected the common person trying to make a living and accomplish everyday tasks?*

**JEWS:** By including all the Jews, these officials imply that Jesus and his disciples were purposely ignoring important elements of religious observance.

*What implications were they making, and for what purpose? Have you ever been accused of being less than Christian because of some behavior that the 'true' Christians deemed essential?*

**CEREMONIAL WASHING:** The religious elite had adopted habits obligatory only to the priests in the temple. They elevated this custom to an "everybody does it" category, and made ordinary life duties into activities that demanded extraordinary attention.

*What might that do to the ordinary citizen's self-concept as a religious person? How would that distort the meaning of the cultic practice? Are there any analogous practices in religion today?*

**TRADITION:** "It's always been done that way", is a saying that moves a common practice into the realm of the 'sacred' at times. Long after anyone remembers why the original practice came into being; people scrupulously follow the obscure ritual without any idea of its significance. It gives a holier than thou aura to the practitioner.

*Are there any remnants like that surviving in your faith practice? Does it impede growth in your faith life in any way? Can the practice serve to separate the 'true' believer from the 'false' one?*

**MARKETPLACE:** A thorny issue in Mark's time was the matter of Gentile inclusion in the early church. In the time when even being with a Gentile rendered one unclean, it was important to wash anything that might have come in contact with such a person. At the market, who knows who might have touched the item in question?

*What thorny issues in the church dealing with ritual have the same potential to divide believers today?*

**ISAIAH:** In Is. 29:13, where the fall of Jerusalem is described, Jesus quotes this text to make the connection that the same thing might happen again.

*Do you think Jesus' challengers understood the point he was making?*

**HYPOCrites:** Jesus uses this word to identify his challengers as actors pretending piety. He unmasks their duplicity and reveals their erroneous practices that distort true worship.

*How can an error in understanding distort a good practice? Have you ever experienced the effects of such an action? Was there anything about it that clued you in to the distortion?*

**LIPS:** "It's easy to say, but hard to do" is a common saying. It was easy to use ostensibly pious practices to project holiness and at the same time do horrendous things to people.

*What is going on today in the church that has the same kind of results?*

**HEARTS:** The heart was seen as the seat of the soul for the people in the time of Isaiah and Jesus. It was where God connected with humanity. When Jesus quotes Isaiah he is at once identifying with Isaiah, and helping the people see what is going on.

*Are there any areas of belief today that we give lip service to but no heart service? What are they?*

**WORSHIP:** Jesus reveals that their worship counts for nothing in God's eyes because the people have elevated their own customs to the same level of importance as God's laws.

*What effect does this have on the accusation made by the challengers? If you had been there that day, what effect would this have had on you?*

**VAIN:** To do something in vain is to render it meaningless.

*How would Jesus' response undermine the religious practices of his day? What challenge to the power structures has he just set loose?*

**RULES TAUGHT BY MEN:** There existed a body of oral tradition that had developed with complex rules and regulations meant to safeguard the people so that they would never break the basic rules (10 commandments). What started out to be a sort of insurance policy became a prison instead.

*What is it about such a practice that makes something seem good at first, but only reveals its limitations later?*

**COMMANDS OF GOD:** The original words (commands) of God were given as a gift to help the people learn to live healthy, holy lives together and with God.

*How did this gift become distorted? What did fear have to do with this distortion?*

**WITHIN / INSIDE:** All the attention to what came in from the outside obscured the real truth that Jesus now identifies as coming from within or from the inside. This moves the understanding of God from an outward orientation to an inward orientation.

*Do you like this change? Is it more difficult this way?*

**EVILS:** All the evils mentioned come from within a person. This is a radical reorientation of thinking for the people. At one level, their lives were simplified by not having to concern themselves with all the ritualistic practices, and at another level they were made much more difficult because now they had to judge their behaviors on their intent.

*What does this do to the people's understanding of God? Does it have the ability to restore the original understanding of the 10 commandments? How?*

**PARALLEL TEXTS:** Mr. 7:1-30 //Mt. 15:1-28; Mk. 7; 6 // Is. 29:13; Mk. 7: 14-23 // Mt. 15:10-20; Mk. 7:21 // Jer. 17:9;

**OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK:** Dt. 4:102, 6-8; Ps. 15: 2-5; James 1:17, 21-22, 27; Mk. 7: 1-8,14-15,21-23;  
Revised common Lectionary: Song of Songs 2:8-13; Ps. 45: 1-2, 6-9; James 1: 17-27; Mk. 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23;

#### **SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:**

**TRADITION:** "The "tradition of the elders" (v. 5) is described by modern anthropologists as "The Great Tradition that is, a set of practices defined, maintained, and practiced by elites who lived in the cities. The Pharisees required that everyone observe this urban tradition. Peasants in the countryside, or itinerants like Jesus and his followers, would have difficulty observing this tradition. Water was scarce and/or not readily available for ablutions, and fishermen routinely came into contact with dead fish, dead animals, and other pollutants. Peasants therefore developed "The Little Tradition" which adapted requirements of "The Great Tradition" to the realities and deficiencies of peasant life. Jesus the artisan not only sided with "The Little Tradition" but hurled a counterchallenge to the Pharisees for minimizing and ignoring the Law of Moses in preference for their "Great Tradition" (Mark 7:9-13)." Knowing this, let us join Jesus and the disciples as this scene unfolds.

Pilch, John J. *The Cultural World of Jesus-Cycle B*. Collegeville, MN. The Liturgical Press. 1996. Page130

"To worship was formerly to prefer God to things, relating them to him [sic] and sacrificing them for him. To worship is now becoming to devote oneself body and soul to the creative act, associating oneself with that act in order to fulfill the world by hard work and intellectual exploration." Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Human Energy*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harvest Books/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1962), 82-102.

104. We may think that we give glory to God only by our worship and prayer, or simply by following certain ethical norms. It is true that the primacy belongs to our relationship with God, but we cannot forget that the ultimate criterion on which our lives will be judged is what we have done for others. Prayer is most precious, for it nourishes a daily commitment to love. Our worship becomes pleasing to God when we devote ourselves to living generously, and allow God's gift, granted in prayer, to be shown in our concern for our brothers and sisters.

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20180319\\_gaudete-et-exsultate.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html)

If we but knew how to adore, we could travel through the world with the tranquility of the great rivers. Eloi Leclerc

Jesus told us to "follow" him on this same transformative journey; instead, we just worshiped him. Richard Rohr

We worship God by walking with love and respect on this planet and with all other creatures. Richard Rohr

Too-easy worship is a clever disguise for actual imitation. Richard Rohr

There are doubtless many reasons for the degeneration of Christianity into churchiness, and the narrowing of the Gospel for all mankind into a set of approved beliefs; but the chief cause must be the worship of an inadequate god--a cramped and regulated god who is a 'good churchman' according to the formulas of the worshipper. For actual behavior infallibly betrays the real object of the man's worship. J. B. Phillips (1906-1982), *Your God is Too Small* [1953]

Many a congregation when it assembles in church must look to the angels like a muddy, puddly shore at low tide; littered with every kind of rubbish and odds and ends - a distressing sort of spectacle. And then the tide of worship comes in, and it's all gone: the dead sea-urchins and jelly-fish, the paper and the empty cans and the nameless bits of rubbish. The cleansing sea flows over the whole lot. So we are released from a narrow, selfish outlook on the universe by a common act of worship. Our little human affairs are reduced to their proper proportion when seen over against the spaceless Majesty and Beauty of God. - Evelyn Underhill

Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father. Its central reality is found 'in spirit and truth.' It is kindled within us only when the Spirit of God touches our human spirit. Forms and rituals do not produce worship, nor does the disuse of forms and rituals. We can use all the right techniques and methods, we can have the best possible liturgy, but we have not worshipped the Lord until Spirit touches spirit. - Richard J. Foster

It seems to me that it is a minority that ever gets the true and full Gospel. We just keep worshiping Jesus and arguing over the exact right way to do it. The amazing thing is that Jesus never once says, “worship me!”, but he often says, “follow me” Christianity is a lifestyle—a way of being in the world that is simple, non-violent, shared, inclusive, and loving. We made it, however, into a formal established religion, in order to avoid the demanding lifestyle itself. One could then be warlike, greedy, racist, selfish, and vain at the highest levels of the church, and still easily believe that Jesus is “my personal Lord and Savior.” The world has no time for such silliness anymore. The suffering on Earth is too great. Richard Rohr

The assumption of philosophers is that you have no way to understand another thing, even minimally, unless there is a little bit of it already in you. Like knows like. If something is completely foreign to you, you’re normally bored by it. There has to be a little bit of something in you to recognize, or to be attracted to, or to be drawn to that thing. We cannot deeply experience or even desire union with something that is totally foreign or alien to us. So God planted a little bit of God inside of us—and all things. It seduces us into even more universal love and life. Richard Rohr

How aware are we of our own inner life, our spirituality - something so intangible yet so priceless? How much effort do we make to perceive that which is not obvious, which can neither be seen nor heard? I believe the exploration and enrichment of the human spirit is what determines our very humanity.—Daisaku Ikeda

Remember that there is a meaning beyond absurdity. Be sure that every little deed counts, that every word has power. Never forget that you can still do your share to redeem the world in spite of all absurdities and frustrations and disappointments.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

The Gospel of Mark not only omits the Pharisees from the list of Christ-killers, but makes them a part of a civilized interaction with Yeshua (Jesus). He and the Pharisees argue point of Halachah, such a dietary rules (2: 16-20), table cleanliness and cooking rules (7: 1-23), matters that involve big spiritual principles in small, everyday practices, as both sides acknowledge. The argument is presented as being generally respectful on each side, if spirited. Akenson, Donald. Saint Saul. NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 2000.

Now the law of love takes precedence over the love of law. The oral tradition (halakah) (Mishnah/Talmud) that Jesus was reacting against, were fixed in written form around 2 CE.

...the world is created by a benevolent God in such a manner that it invites a risk-taking attitude and rewards it in the long term. Risk taking is a non-zero-sum game. The gifts of risk taking are overall greater than the potential damages, and by risking one’s life one does not take anything away from others; the risk taker explores new territories rather than exploiting the domains of the neighbor. Gregersen, Neils. Risk and Religion. Zygon. 6/03. Pg. 368.

In an honor-based culture, conflict is unavoidable. All males must engage either in public display of honor or in challenges to the honor claims of others. The Pharisees and their scholars (“scribes”) routinely spy on Jesus and his disciples in order to challenge their growing honorable reputation. In this reading, they challenge Jesus’ disciples failure to observe “The Great Tradition”.....that is, a set of practices defined, maintained, and practiced by elite’s who lived in the cities.

Pilch, John J. The Cultural World of Jesus-Cycle B. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. 1996. Page 130.

Like, Hillel, (great Jewish sage) Jesus can be imagined to have been one of those who promoted more lay participation in the Temple ritual. The Temple routine of Jesus’ day, for all its practicality and efficiency, could be given a quiet unpleasant interpretation. The priests, one may say, dealt with *all* sacrificer’s as if they were impure. For according to biblical tradition, a person who was ritually unclean could not offer his own sacrifice - the priest performed the sacrifice instead (2 Chron. 30:17). For Jesus, God’s people were all pure (Mk. 7:14-23) and should have more involvement with the sacrificial procedure than the contemporary Temple establishment granted them. Lang, Bernhard. The Eucharist: A Sacrificial Formula Preserved. Bible Review. 12/94. Page 46.

It is very difficult to find the clear instances of Jesus actually transgressing the Torah. His disciples, not Jesus himself, are accused of disregarding the ritual washing of the hands Mark 7: 1-8. This was not a biblical requirement for the laity. It was a purity law spread by the Pharisees, which only in Jesus’ time had become a common Jewish practice. Gallileans were often lax about purity laws such as this. Pg. 77. Bruteau, Beatrice. Radical Optimism. NY. Crossroad. 1993.

...what the disciples eat in any house that might receive them is clean. Israelites produced what was clean from within themselves, ready to be shared with others. (Mk. 7:15). (*An explanation (defiled hands) was inserted for those who didn’t know the traditions, i. e. gentiles.*) Chilton, Bruce. Rabbi Jesus. NY. Doubleday. 2000.

In a chapter, “Yehhua the Hasid”, Daniel Matt engages the discussion of Jesus and the law from a Jewish perspective. Pages 74ff. He asserts that it was the early church that set aside the food laws. He feels that Jesus himself would have kept them.

Bruteau, Beatrice. Jesus Through Jewish Eyes. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books. 2001.

It is quite possible to perform very ordinary actions with so high an intention as to serve God therein better than in far more important things done with a less pure intention.... Jean N. Grou

Spiritual disciplines are not ways to eradicate all our desires but ways to order them so that they can serve one another and together serve God. Henri Nouwen

7.1-23. Washing of hands and the commandment of God (Mt 15.1-20). The issue of following Torah rules for kosher food and ritual purity was, along with circumcision for Centile male converts, one of the contentious areas that followers of Jesus had to resolve (see Acts 15.19-20). 2: Defiled, see "Impurity and Healing," p. 63. 3-4: That Mark must explain these practices indicates that the audience (though not the setting) is largely Centile; this explanation is lacking in Mt 15.2 (Luke and John lack this story). The Pharisees were known for observing traditions of the elders not found in scripture, including hand washing (an observance that acknowledged the likelihood of contact with things that were ritually unclean in the course of daily life, but that did not require total immersion), but it is probably incorrect that all the Jews observed these laws at this time. Sadducees—and most Jews?—did not follow the Pharisees in this matter. This raises the possibility that even if Jesus' followers disagreed with the Pharisees on hand washing, they were in agreement with many, if not most Jews. Mark recognized the commandment of God, but disputes arise here over which are still binding and also which practices are merely human tradition. Pgs. 73-4.

Levine, Amy-Jill & Brettler, Marc Zvi. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#). NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 2011

In the prophetic tradition God neither hankers for, nor is especially pleased by, our songs and our incense, but is primarily concerned for social systems that function justly, for people who deal with each other mercifully and compassionately, and for those who walk humbly for they know that God's presence in history is redemptively necessary – they cannot do it alone. Pg. 115

Lee, Bernard. *The Future Church of 140 BCE*. NY. Crossroad Pub. 1995.

#### **SUGGESTED READINGS:**

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: [www.theark1.com](http://www.theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2015. Pgs.124-127 . To order contact [Carol.Oberfoell@loras.edu](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@loras.edu)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2006. Pgs. 128-13.

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2009. Pgs. 149-152..

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2011-12. Pgs. 119-122.

Wells, Abbie Jane. [The Gospel According to Abbie Jane Wells](#). Thomas More Press, Chicago. KEEPING TOGETHER: 1985. Page 77F.

Bausch, William J. [Storytelling](#). Twenty-Third Pub., Mystic, CT. 1984. TANZAN AND EKIDO: Page 62-3.

Mitchell, Stephen. [The Enlightened Heart](#). Harper & Row, NY. 1989. TRUTY: Page 37. RIGHT AND WRONG: Page 59

Grana, Janice. [Images](#). St. Mary's College Press, Winona, MN. 1976. A NEW DAY: Page 17 CHAINES: Page 59 PRISON: Page 123.

benShea, Noah. [Jacob the Baker](#). Villard Books, NY.1989. JACOB'S RIDDLE: Page 64.

White, William B. [Stories For the Telling](#). Augsburg Pub. House, Minneapolis, MN. 1986. ABRAHAM AND MARY: Page 138f.