



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

September 1, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

15th Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 119b CW

Second Lesson: [Romans 9:30-10:4](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Mark 7:1-8, 14, 15, 21-23](#)

The Need for Followership **Followers of Christ Obey His Law from the Heart** **JESUS CLEANS HOUSE**

1. " _____ " by our own _____
2. Unclean from the _____
3. Unclean toward _____ and _____
4. _____ by _____

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

We've been talking about food a lot. We had three weeks on the "Bread of Life" and now we talk about how you eat food. The Pharisees are complaining about the disciples because they are not washing their hands before they eat. Jesus is going to talk about "clean" and "unclean" foods, or if the things we eat can make us "unclean." This is one of the times where you finish reading the Gospel Lesson—we have our Old Testament, New Testament, and then the Gospel Lesson—and you finish the Gospel Lesson and say "This is the Gospel of the Lord" and if you were listening along, you maybe said "The Gospel? Where is the Gospel in here?" There is a lot of Law in this text. As we look in this, we are going to find out where the Gospel of this all is, because the truth of this is that Jesus is really bringing the Law where the Pharisees were bringing the Law. What I would say as we are talking about being clean and unclean, I believe that Jesus here is going to be cleaning house. He is really going to be showing the Pharisees what is true about being clean and unclean and about hearts and about how you eat and really change their view on things, and hopefully help us change our view and understanding of what is clean and unclean and how we view life, traditions and our hearts.

The struggle that the Pharisees were having (and I think the struggle that we have), we see as they begin. It says: ***The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. 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 defiled hands?" He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites..."*** Why is Jesus calling them hypocrites? It talked earlier about all the traditions that they held. They were holding to the traditions of the elders, like washing their hands and washing cups and pitchers and kettles. These Pharisees really believed that they were "clean" by their own standards. They set up all these laws and made this fence around God's Law. They added law after law, over 600 laws in addition to what God had commanded in the Old Testament, to make them feel clean. They were clean by their own standards.

Do you find that you do that at times, too? Do you feel that you are clean by your own standards?—that it is very easy to look at what you have done and set up a law for yourself that is easy to follow. "I do these things, but those people, they don't." "It's easy for me to do these things..." and what we tend to do is just ignore the things that we struggle with, so we can say we are "clean" by our own standards. We love to make those standards that we can meet. It's actually why "work-righteous" religions are so popular in the world today. If you look at Mormonism and Islam, they are growing so fast. It's because they have this work-righteous standard that people feel they can meet and then they are clean. It's the exact opposite of what Paul was talking about in Romans where, instead of working for righteousness, we know that we are saved by faith, but we love that. We love to justify ourselves and make us clean in our own standards.

So to teach them what the problem is, he tells them what is wrong with their hearts. As he calls them hypocrites and says that Isaiah prophesied about them, he says this from [Isaiah 29:13](#): ***"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules."*** They are following those human rules, those traditions. It's easy for religious people to pile up those laws and the things they want to follow. We can start to follow traditions more than anything. We can even forget why we do them. "What is the meaning behind this?" "But that's how we've always done it." So we always have to go back and say, "What is the purpose of this tradition?" and really struggle when we are judging someone else by their tradition and say "What is behind it?" Jesus is asking that very thing. ***"...their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules."*** You have let go the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions. We have to examine those times when we are doing that—holding to traditions.

Jesus explains what the huge problem is. He says, ***“Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”*** So where is the problem?

We think we are clean, but where are we unclean? We are *unclean from the heart*, from our deepest parts, from the thing that leads our desires, all those things. We have a sinful nature, a sinful flesh that we are born with, that is passed down from generation to generation. It’s a simple thought.

I was with the 7th-8th Grade and was reviewing when we talked about these five marks of discipleship. The first one we say is “You need to deny yourself if you want to be a disciple of Jesus.” To deny yourself is to put God first and others first. How many of us do that? How many of us wake up in the morning and say, “I’m going to deny my heart and my wants and desires”? Those things in our hearts are what we struggle with. The world says “No.” The world says the opposite. The world says “Follow your heart. The best thing you can do is if your heart says you are this or feel this way, you must follow that. The greatest sin is to deny your wishes. If you are unhappy in marriage, follow your heart. You have to feel good and feel happy.” Or whatever those desires are in our hearts, they say “Don’t check them. You’re right!” But we have to examine them because out of our hearts comes all of these problems—greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy. What does that lead to? It certainly makes us unclean, but you can break it down a little bit more. It makes us *unclean toward God and others*. We said that first part of being a disciple is denying ourselves, following God and putting others first, but so often those desires, those sinful things are going against God and against the people around us.

When Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees, he quotes Isaiah. What a slap in the face to the Pharisees this must have been, to quote the Old Testament and say “Isaiah is talking about YOU.” He is saying “You worship, you try so hard, you try to be so faithful but you worship in vain.” We have to be so careful of our own desires and our wants and if we say “We must do it this way” or “This is the only way,” then we make ourselves into a god and ignore what God is really wanting from us. He wants our heart. He wants to see us loving him and serving him and submitting to him and not see this as a way to tally up all the good we’ve done by being in worship or doing a daily devotion. Those things are great, but Paul explains in Romans that’s not what earns us heaven. We do those things out of love. But when we are comparing ourselves and boasting about ourselves, it’s a slap in the face to God. And look at all those other sins that so much hurt those around us: theft, murder, greed, adultery, malice, deceit, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. It’s so hard. We fail to check ourselves and we become boastful and arrogant and think our ways are right and we tend to look down on others. We

tend to think that our ways are always best and "They have to be wrong" or "They are doing something out of a sinful thought and way" where I don't know the whole picture. So I can have slander against them or arrogance. It's so important for us to check our hearts and go with patience to others and check when we are falling into these temptations and sins that are hurting others. When we break God's commands and think that we know what is best and follow our hearts, we are saying "God, I don't need your word. I don't need those things that you are saying are good and right. I know what is better." That hurts God. It hurts others. It causes us to be unclean with God and with others.

This is where the text ends. Do we end with "Amen" there? That would be a way to end a sermon. It's so filled with Law, as we said in the beginning. Where is the Gospel in this text? The truth is there is not a whole lot of Gospel right here. But one thing that we see is God loves us so much, Jesus loves these people and loves us so much to call this all out to attention to us. But then to see the contrast of the Law and that Gospel that we need so much. We see the Law that causes us to fall and see our failings and see where we haven't loved, but then we see the Gospel. We see one who has cleansed us. Though we are unclean, we need to be cleaned. That's the Law. The Gospel says that we are cleansed. We are cleansed by Jesus. We are not just cleansed in a little way.

We've seen a few baptisms recently. We are going to see another baptism next week. That's when we see how Jesus cleanses us. He washes us clean through the waters of baptism, through his work, through his blood, that he was perfect in our place. In all the ways that we struggle to follow God and to show love to others and to ignore his Word, Jesus was perfect, and he forgives us. We've been cleansed. What does that do to our hearts? Those hearts that we say by nature are against God and are filled with sinful thoughts and desires? Through baptism, through his Word, through being in his Word more and more, the Holy Spirit works in us and it says it gives us a new heart. We have a new heart.

There is a lot of Law in here, but you Christians, you have a new heart that is renewed by his Word, by the love of Christ, to say "no" to these things; to say "no" to the sinful thoughts and desires of our hearts; to go forward and love God; and to know that we are not earning anything but it's just a way to say "Thanks" for the work of Christ.

One of the interesting things that Jesus says here is, ***"Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them."*** What he is talking about at that time is the unclean and clean food. The Jewish people still had the laws that there were unclean foods. Here he is saying "No. Nothing can make you unclean from the outside." But is there something from the outside that can make you clean? You can't make yourself clean from the inside. It's not our hearts that make us clean. It's not our works that make us clean. It's that Gospel message, the work of Jesus that goes into our hearts, into our ears and it cleans us. That work of Jesus from the outside in restores us and renews us

and gives us a new faith. So followers of Jesus—we turn to our Savior; the one who was perfect in our place, and we know that he is the one who cleans us. He cleans us inside and out and helps us to live with a new heart; a new heart that says “Thanks” and takes that Gospel message and shows it in love and words so that others may know that their hearts, too, may be cleansed with peace and forgiveness. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.