

October 8, 2023

Matthew 15:10-20

“From the Heart”

1. A guest came to the church
  - a. A few years ago a gentleman came to the church wanting to have a tour of the sanctuary.
    - i. I am guessing he was from india.
    - ii. I walked with him from the office to the sanctuary and right out here in the little entryway foyer he took off his shoes in order to enter the sanctuary.
  - b. I am familiar with traditions in some religious groups where the people entering their holy space take off their shoes before entering
    - i. Perhaps there is a connection to the story of when Moses came up to the burning bush, and being in God’s presence, God ordered Moses to take off his shoes because the ground he was on was holy
    - ii. But there is also the sense that in some religious communities they do it because they then wash their feet
    - iii. Muslims wash their feet and their hands and maybe their face before entering the mosque.
    - iv. Often the practical reason is that they are going to be kneeling and standing on beautiful rugs in the mosque and it feels respectful to enter cleanly
    - v. But it also means it is a time of purification, making themselves ready before the Lord, readying themselves for the act of prayer and worship.
  - c. There are cleansing rituals in the Jewish and Christian traditions
    - i. In the Jewish traditions cleansing rituals before an act of worship are but one of the many ways in which they sought to present themselves pure before the Lord
    - ii. The Jewish tradition has many ways in which it seeks to keep the people clean and pure before the Lord
      1. You have heard of Jewish people keeping Kosher
      2. That refers to rules about behavior to stay ritually clean, and in particular it relates to what they are allowed to eat and what not to eat
      3. Again, the reasons may have been a practical reason (don’t eat pork because their meat may have carried disease)
      4. But there is also a liturgical reason, as the law that Moses gave from God included that particular prohibition
      5. (Muslims also do not eat pork for practical and religious reasons)
2. In our passage today, there is a discussion about what to eat and how

- a. In fact, right before our passage Jesus is getting challenged by the religious authorities
    - i. They were upset that the disciples were at times eating without first washing their hands.
    - ii. But Jesus criticizes them right back by saying that they should worry about keeping commandments about how they should care for other people, and not just the ones having to do with ritual purification
      - 1. Now, I know my mom would make me turn from the table and go wash my hands before eating.
      - 2. So kids, don't even try to say to your parents that Jesus gave you permission not to wash your hands. Wash your hands because Jesus also says to obey your parents!
  - b. Which leads to the conversation Jesus had about what really is going to defile us, meaning what is going to make us ritually unclean, unclean before God
    - i. And I suppose you can say that here Jesus is using some potty humor because he's saying: what you eat comes in and ends up in the sewer, that's not what you should worry about in terms of being unclean before God
    - ii. Worry about what is in your heart. God cares a whole lot more about that
    - iii. Now here I wished that Jesus could focus on the nice things that come from the heart, but instead he makes the case of the emotions from the heart which separate us from God and from one another
      - 1. *For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.*
      - 2. But we can figure out those things which connect us to God too:
      - 3. For out of the heart also come good intentions, healing, fidelity, morality, abundance, truth, encouragement.
3. It's easy to wash your hands. But how do you wash your heart?
- a. Only God can do that. But we have an external ritual to show that God is doing it, and that of course is Baptism.
    - i. When we are baptized, when we remember our baptism, part of what we remember is that God washes us from within as the water washes us on the outside
    - ii. We are reminded God cleansing us at baptism makes it possible for us to be allowed to worship
    - iii. When I baptized Finn, I spoke of God's forgiveness, and of God's welcome to us
  - b. Now, perhaps you could ask something the religious authorities would have just to trip Jesus up: what happens to us BEFORE baptism? Are we spiritually clean then?
    - i. So much ink has been spilled trying to answer that question, actually

- ii. But think about it this way:
  - 1. pouring water over Finn's head isn't the beginning of God's love or God's presence in his life
  - 2. pouring water over his head is our physical sign of what God has done, is doing and will continue to do: to claim Finn as God's own
- iii. Ultimately what Jesus is saying to us in this passage is that if we worry primarily about the mechanics of belief we could end up with a surface-level understanding of our relationship with God
  - 1. Our relationship with God starts much earlier than when someone takes off their shoes or washes their feet, or is baptized
  - 2. And it is much deeper and complex too.
  - 3. But the simplicity of clean water can be a powerful reminder of the simple nature of God's unconditional love for us. If only we stopped and allowed ourselves to meditate on that and feel that deep in our hearts.
- 4. When you wash your hands give thanks that God washed our hearts first.

#### Reflection questions

- 1. Share a story when you were impacted by the goodness coming from the heart of someone you know.
- 2. Why is Jesus comparing what goes into our stomach to what come out of our hearts in Matthew 15:10-20?
- 3. What religious practices/beliefs do people overemphasize only to completely miss a larger truth God is trying to teach us?