

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Hypocrisy"

Scripture: Mark 7:1-23, Psalm 51:1-3, 6-7

Opening Hymn: Fairest Lord Jesus 375

Closing Hymn: Lord, I want to be a Christian 571

Children's Hymn: Lead me Jesus; I will follow 646,

Choruses: Open the eyes of my heart,

Rev. Steve Filyk

February 16, 2020

6th Sunday after the Epiphany

I was tempted to lead worship today
Wearing jeans and a t-shirt.

But I knew that wouldn't fly.

Some people would tell me it wasn't professional;
That dressing down would disrespect those who gathered.

Others would go further.
Others would argue that leading worship
In a shirt that says 'Coca-Cola' is dishonoring to God.

While I might agree with the first argument
I'm not so sure about the second.

A quick search on the web tells me
that there is no Scriptural command
to wear a blazer and a collar on Sunday.

Wearing our 'Sunday best'
Is at best
a way that *some* people symbolically represent
Their adherence to the fourth commandment

[the commandment to remember the Sabbath day,
To keep it holy].

Now it may express your devotion.
But it is a tradition,
Not a commandment of Holy Scripture.

Despite some impressions,
Wearing freshly shined shoes at worship
Isn't a central concern for God's people.

PAUSE

Today's reading from the Gospel of Mark
Takes us into a discussion of what
Is at the center of God's will for God's people.

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law
Confront Jesus about the habits of his disciples.
It seems they weren't washing their hands before meals.

Now just to be clear,
This wasn't about hygiene but about holiness.
It wasn't about germs
But about being a people that were 'set apart' for God.

In the law the priests were commanded
To wash their hands and feet before serving at the altar.
This included washing their hands before eating the meat
That was sacrificed.

The Pharisees took this law and extended it.
They applied it to the entire nation.

The extension may have had something to do
with the priests overlooking this command.
Making it a law for everyone ensured that the priests
Lived by the rules they were given.ⁱ

The extension of this law may have also been an attempt
To extend the holiness of the priests to the entire nation.
What did God say to Israel?
“You will be for me a kingdom of priests
and a holy nation.”ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

In either case this ‘rule’ was an attempt to put a fence around God’s law,
To “protect the law from careless or inadvertent violations”.^{iv}

Dressing up on Sunday can be a reminder
That the Sabbath is a special day,
And that worship is a unique calling.

In this way the law is protected by this ‘fence’.

But when the Pharisees confront Jesus about his disciples’ failure
To respect these traditions, Jesus goes on the attack.

(Keep in mind that the disciples have left *everything* to follow Jesus,
And here they are being critiqued for this small supposed infraction.)

Jesus responds by telling the Pharisees they are hypocrites.

He tells them that while they hold on to
those symbolic expressions of devotion,
They disregard commandments
that are at the heart of God's law.

Jesus argues that those human rules and extensions

Put our attention on the wrong things,
And sometimes even nullify the very commandments
That they supposedly upheld.

In support of his assertion Jesus speaks about a tradition
of devoting resources to God.

He says the Pharisees use it as a loophole
to get out of caring for their parents.

“Mom's gonna have to wait until a public bed is available;
I'm using my extra money
to buy myself a memorial window at the church.”

Jesus highlights the ridiculousness of a tradition
Undermining a commandment.

But Jesus doesn't stop there.

He goes on to talk about purity laws relating to food.
And just to be clear, these laws *were* commandments.

Jesus tells the crowd that “By focusing on outward purity,
they are avoiding the much deeper challenge of the gospel,
the challenge of the human heart.”^v

It is the heart, Jesus later explains to his disciples,
that is the source of everything evil:

“sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed,
malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander,
arrogance and folly...”^{vi}

These are the things that, according to Jesus,
We should be looking out for.

The real issue isn't whether
we are wearing a blazer or a t-shirt to worship,
The real issue is what is going on in our heart.

Jesus noted the hypocrisy among the religious people
In his community.

So how about us?

Do we get caught up in trivial symbolic expressions of righteousness
While we evade the transformation of our character
That is envisioned by God's law?

In 2013 the Barna Group did some research
on contemporary Christians in the United States.

They wanted to know whether the actions and attitude
of self-proclaimed followers of Jesus
Were aligned with the actions and attitudes of Jesus or
The actions and attitudes of the Pharisees.

They did this by asking 20 questions
And judging whether the respondents shared
a Christ-like or self-righteous response.

For example, the actions and attitudes of Jesus would include:
I try to discover the needs of non-Christians
rather than waiting for them to come to me.
AND I feel compassion for people
who are not following God
and doing immoral things.

More Pharisaical action and attitudes would include:
I like to point out those
who do not have the right theology or doctrine.
AND It's not my responsibility to help people
who won't help themselves.

After running people through the questions and analyzing their responses
They found that most self-identified Christians [were] characterized
by having the attitudes and actions
researchers identified as Pharisaical.

Just over half... [qualified] for this category (51%).

On the other end of the spectrum, 14% of [the] self-identified Christians...
just one out of every seven Christians...
[represented] the actions and attitudes
Barna researchers found to be consistent
with those of Jesus.^{vii}

The rest were somewhere in between.

And so we hear bad news.

Hypocrisy isn't just an ancient problem.
It is alive and well in the church today.

But there is good news.

The Good News is that Jesus is an expert cardiologist.

He didn't come among us
just to make us look better on the outside,
But to change from the inside out.

So will you welcome the transformation

Jesus wants to accomplish in your life?

Let's pray.

ⁱ See "Handwashing in Judaism" *Wikipedia* en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handwashing_in_Judaism

ⁱⁱ Exodus 19:6 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ Douglas R.A. Hare "Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23, Exegetical Perspective" *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 4: Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ)*.

^{iv} Lamar Williamson Jr. *Mark* 134

^v NT Wright *Mark for Everyone* 91

^{vi} Mark 7:21-22 NIV

^{vii} "Christians: More Like Jesus or Pharisees?" June 3, 2013 *The Barna Group* www.barna.com/research/christians-more-like-jesus-or-pharisees/