

13 Pent B

James 1:17-27

Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

Isn't it fantastic how the Scriptures always seem to relate exactly to what the times are or what you have been thinking about all week? For the past few weeks I have been thinking about how we connect our Sunday religious experience with our work week. After finding an old copy of a very interesting book called "The Monday Connection": How to bring spirituality to the work place. And I have also been thinking about an experience I had in my home parish in Sitka, Alaska. We had a Wednesday night service that was very intimate and I think profoundly spiritual. I loved it, I looked forward to it because it brought respite and spiritual renewal into my hectic weekly schedule. BUT there began a controversy revolving around the "who's" and the "How's" of the ritual of taking Communion. There was a man there who was a VERY hard, dedicated, worker who was a pillar of his faith community. He was at Church early every Sunday and every Wednesday.

He always contributed his time and his very substantial treasure above and beyond any in the parish. But it seems that some people took offense to him receiving the bread, the body of Jesus and the wine, the blood of Jesus with such dirty hands. You see, he owned a tire store and that grease and grime embedded in the skin and under the finger nails never really completely came off and some people started to mumble about his so-called un-cleanliness. “Well, I won’t let him dip it himself and “I make sure I don’t touch his hand when I put the bread in”. You know, typical things we all might say. And that really stuck with me. Here is this man, the most faithful , committed , righteous, un assuming servant of the Lord who really knew how to bring his religion into his work and labor- becoming nothing but dirty hands in church.

And as we enter into Labor Day weekend I find myself thinking about my own work week. You all may think “well, her work week is all about faith and religion” well that’s true. But I labor at hearing God’s message and effectively communicating it to you.

Often in my preaching, I want to share some new idea or deep thought. I want you to go away from Church thinking. I want you to ponder some. But if my preaching makes you think on Sundays but has no effect on Monday, Tuesday...etc.....I've wasted your time and Our Lord's resources in the Holy Spirit. And I don't want to do that. My job I feel is to give you, through the traditions and rituals of the Episcopal Church, strength and knowledge and encouragement in the Holy Spirit to bring your faith in God through Christ into your daily life. WOW, what a privilege!

But how do we do that faith? How do we make sure we don't forget what we do and say and hear on Sunday like we forget our own image when we turn from the mirror. And James' answer to that is --be doers not simply hearers of the Word. James says "Do" and what a debate he created through the whole church and it still is raging today. Does action or faith alone make us "right" with God?

I think a lot of people don't realize that James doesn't tell us to stop thinking, he charges us with putting our thinking, our belief in God, into real action that changes our world. In other words, the impact of Sunday's worship on Wednesday's work day (Monday is too close) is the measure of true religion.

And Jesus related the same thing to the Pharisees. They wanted, they depended on, right practice and strict ritual to make them righteous in God's eyes. But Jesus in this hand washing exchange tells them the emphasis should be on changing human character, being right with God means having God's Word imbedded or ingrafted in your heart all the time, it's about a transformation of the heart by grace that isn't dependent on ritual or right actions in church.

Isn't it funny, Jesus had just gotten through with feeding over 9,000 people with some sardines and bread, he walks on water, he heals a woman's daughter, ministers and preaches to masses of people and the best the Teachers of the Law and religion could come up with is "your followers have poor table manners"!

What catches my ear in this Gospel passage is the quickness of the Pharisees to point out another persons perceived flaws. Since they were keepers of an external Law, they perhaps never looked inward to see where their moral compass was. They felt compelled to bring someone else's sins out for airing while not even considering their own "inner being" sins. And things haven't changed over these thousands of years. We tend to only focus on our outward appearance or rituals, especially as a Church, and neglect the importance of our inward transformation.

And I think this is at the core of being able to connect our Sunday faith with our work day in and day out. I hear Our Lord saying that It's not the rituals or traditions that goes into a person and makes them clean- they are solely exterior- it is how you ingest, how you internalize, how you respond to and hold in your heart the love of God and live the faith -that purifies a body and pleases God, Jesus said. Your relationship, your obedience, your love, your honor and gratefulness to God must reside within.

We don't have to **do** religion "right" we have to **do** our faith both in and out of the sanctuary building.

No matter what you do or where you do it your labor can be a worthy act of faith, accepted lovingly by God, if you tend sheep, or teach, or drive a truck, or dry clean.

If you are a stay at home Mom or Dad, or a plumber, a lawyer, a salesperson or tire shop owner and you connect your Sunday faith with your work week doing-then all ground, all places, home, school, office, highway, and shop are Holy Ground and our work and actions through the Holy Spirit are sanctified.

Let me tell you

Jesus knows that the human heart, dirty and blackened by sin will seek to serve only itself and in that self-service is defiled. It is only by God's grace in Christ and by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word that the predispositions of the heart can change.

We are able to walk in newness of life because we have been cleansed and refreshed by the Blood of Jesus Christ and renewed by the Spirit.

You hear that, You believe that today don't you? Now, the question for you to answer on Wednesday is-- how will you DO it? Amen.