

## A talk on Mark 7 1-8 14&15 21-23 by John Cole

Loving Father, May the words that I speak be yours and not mine. And the words that we hear be what you, want heard.

Amen.

I can remember my Nan saying to me "I hope you've washed your hands young man" before sitting down for dinner, and then she would check to make sure I had. On the VERY rare occasion that I hadn't I would receive the same lecture about "if I keep eating with dirty or mucky hands I would have trees growing out of my ears" Obviously that never happened, so I must of been good and washed them, well most of the time anyway. But of course I reckon there is more to the gospel reading you heard than about washing our hands before meals.

We start off with the Pharisees and Scribes coming from Jerusalem, with the sole purpose of attacking Jesus through his disciples and followers, this is the third time in Mark this has happened, the other two times are, when Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house with all the "tax collectors" and "sinners," The Pharisees asked the Disciples why was he eating with them? No doubt they were trying to get the disciples to question Jesus about this. Again in Mark 3 v20 the Pharisees came down from Jerusalem and said to the crowd, Jesus's family and the disciples, that he was "possessed by Beelzebul, by the prince of demons he is driving out demons." They were desperately trying to drive a wedge between Jesus and everyone who was listening. Jesus, at this time was gaining momentum, he was adding to his number daily, Jesus was not conforming to the teachings of the Pharisees, and they were probably worried about losing their followers to him. This was also just after Jesus had been healing quite a number of people, wherever he went, in villages, towns and even the countryside. People were bringing their sick relatives and friends to him.

Mark goes on to say "The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus following the TRADITION of the elders, and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it." There are also many other TRADITIONS they observed, the washing of cups pots and bronze kettles, also added to the TRADITIONS, the Mosaic law was made up of 350 "must not does" and 250 "must does," Understandably quite confusing.

However these TRADITIONS of washing were more symbolic than hygienic. These rules were not even derived from scripture. So Jesus answers the Pharisees with a prophecy from Isaiah "This people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human TRADITION."

We also heard in the first reading from Deuteronomy Moses teaching the people not to add or take anything away from the commandments God gave them. So what were the Pharisees up to? Well it seems they were honouring God outwardly, but not inwardly. They were eager to honour God through their own TRADITIONS and rules, but chose to ignore God's specific guidelines for honouring him; His commandments. I have mentioned the word TRADITION a few times, i'm wondering are there traditions we place above God's word?

So Jesus calls to the crowd again and says that there is nothing outside a person by going in can make you "unclean," this I might add is backed up again when Peter had his vision in Joppa, of a sheet coming down from Heaven with all sorts of animals in it, three times God told Peter to eat, there were specific guidelines to what animals the people could eat, or even touch, so Peter would of been quite shocked at this instruction. And in the end God had to tell Peter not to call anything he has made defiled. So Jesus goes on to explain that it is what comes out, not what goes in that makes you "defiled." Having read this line a few times I have come to the conclusion, (reluctantly) that this does not give me license to be able to have as much of my homemade wine as I might like! And I do apologise but I just couldn't resist putting that in. Anyway I would imagine most of us do wash our hands before having something to eat. So we clean ourselves on the outside but what about the inside?

I have looked up on the internet about cleaning ourselves inside, I have just found out that by "Detoxing" we can achieve this. For those of you who have not been to "Slimming world" (Other

companies are available) Basically, detoxification means cleansing the blood. This is done by removing impurities from the blood in the liver, where toxins are processed for elimination. The body also eliminates toxins through the Kidneys, intestines, lungs, lymphatic system and skin. However when these systems are compromised, impurities aren't properly filtered and the body is adversely affected. A detox programme can help the body's natural cleansing process by: Resting the body through fasting; Stimulating the liver to drive toxins from the body, Promoting elimination through the intestines, kidneys and skin; Improving circulation of the blood, and refueling the body with natural nutrients. So it is possible to clean ourselves on the inside, but there was no mention of the heart?

Well Jesus goes on to list the things coming from within, from the heart: Theft, murder, slander etc, this is what defiles people. This is where we are tested, so Jesus looks at us from within, from our hearts, it's about who we are inwardly that reflects what we are outwardly. I don't know about you but there are times when I say or do things that I'm not doing it wholeheartedly, I do things on my own accord and not asking or including God in these, and some of the things that I say or do are not always in keeping of how God would like me to be.

That's just one of the reasons why I come here on a Sunday morning, to tell God I'm sorry. We have all done this at the start of our service this morning when we were invited to say "The Confession" It starts " Most merciful God , Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed.

We see in the media, daily, people being abused on so many levels and platforms, and all sorts of crimes being committed. What is worrying is the people who commit these atrocities are from all walks of life. Thankfully although sometimes it doesn't seem like it, these people make up a very small minority of the population. The majority of the population however shows love and compassion and this is shared freely especially in the face of any adversary as also seen in the media. This is just two examples of what can come from the Heart.

Shortly some of us will be taking communion, Eleanor will ask us to come to the Altar in Faith, and to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, If you don't mind I would just like to read what we will be saying shortly.

Most merciful Lord, your love compels us to come in.

Our hands were unclean, our hearts were unprepared;

We Were not fit even to eat the crumbs from under your table.

But you Lord, are the God of our salvation, and share your bread with sinners.

So CLEANSE and feed us with the precious body and blood of your Son, that he may live in us and we in him; and that we, with the whole company of Christ, may sit and eat in your Kingdom.

If we let God work from within day by day, week by week, love will overcome hatred, compassion will overcome indifference and good will defeat evil. Perhaps this is a way of DETOXING OUR HEARTS!

At the start of this talk I mentioned dirty hands and trees growing out of my ears, thankfully as I look around I can't see anyone else with a tree growing from their ears either, and I'm now sure Eleanor will be checking our hands when we come up to the Altar. So whether you receive communion or a blessing, or even if it's not your custom to come to the Altar, let's open ourselves up and invite God to come in and live within us, let him refresh us and cleanse us, not just on the outside, but more importantly on the inside, because that is where our hearts are, that is where we are looked at.

Amen.