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

On the Mend: Healing What Ails Us – Healing Intentions

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Mark 7:1-8; 14-15; 21-23 Common English Bible

The Pharisees and some legal experts from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. They saw some of his disciples eating food with unclean hands. (They were eating without first ritually purifying their hands through washing. The Pharisees and all the Jews don’t eat without first washing their hands carefully. This is a way of observing the rules handed down by the elders. Upon returning from the marketplace, they don’t eat without first immersing themselves. They observe many other rules that have been handed down, such as the washing of cups, jugs, pans, and sleeping mats.) So the Pharisees and legal experts asked Jesus, “Why are your disciples not living according to the rules handed down by the elders but instead eat food with ritually unclean hands?” He replied, “Isaiah really knew what he was talking about when he prophesied about you hypocrites. He wrote, this people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. Their worship of me is empty since they teach instructions that are human words. You ignore God’s commandment while holding on to rules created by humans and handed down to you.” Then Jesus called the crowd again and said, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God’s sight; rather, the things that come out of a person contaminate the person.” “It’s from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come: sexual sins, thefts, murders, adultery, greed, evil actions, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, insults, arrogance, and foolishness. All these evil things come from the inside and contaminate a person in God’s sight.”

Anyone else exhausted? Anyone else sick and tired of being sick and tired? Are you ready to be on the mend? Over the next weeks we are going to be talking about uncovering the wounds that hold us back from the fullness of life. How can we move out of old ways of being into new possibilities of being?

The passage that we read from Mark finds us right in the middle of an argument that we hear all the time. It is a fairly routine part of my day, making sure everyone has washed their hands before dinner. That is what this passage is about, right? Washing your hands? But it’s not only about washing hands. It is about the tradition and authority behind that practice and that is what the Pharisees press Jesus about, “Why are your disciples not living according to the rules handed down by the elders?”[[1]](#footnote-2) Why are Jesus and his disciples not following tradition? Why are they not doing what has always been done?

When Jews talked about what made a person clean, they actually were talking about what made a person good. Jesus wants us to know it is not about authority and honoring those who have been in charge. It is about how we treat each other. Want to talk about tradition, Jesus asks? In the verses in Mark 7 that we didn’t read, Jesus says fine, let’s talk about the tradition, I mean commandment, of honoring your parents. Seems pretty straight forward to Jesus, and yet the religious leaders had created a religious loop-hole by which you could declare your wealth an offering to God and thereby not have to share it with your parents![[2]](#footnote-3)

It is about how we treat each other and healing our intentions. John Wesley, the first Methodist, was frustrated in his day because people would dress up on Sundays and play church. They would pretend to have Jesus in their lives. They were going through the motions but not really meaning what they did or said. And people were doing and saying “religious” things just to make people think they were holy.

It is easier to play church because you get to go through the motions on Sunday, but the rest of the week you can forget things like hope, forgiveness, sincerity, compassion. If you are being the church, then hope and peace and love and joy, those things that we talk about on Sundays, they are actually an integral part of our life. Our intentions are honest and genuine and we really mean what we say. Jesus says we need to listen to the heart of the law, not the letter of the law, because inner faith will produce outer actions.

The writer of the Book of James reminds us, “we need to be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive ourselves” (1:22). So, we need to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). We need to support ministries that uplift all people. Jesus refuses to get upset about how clean a person is. God is not concerned with how dirty we are on the outside, but with our intentions on the inside, whether we say kind words and do loving deeds.

Here I Am Lord is Francie Hansen’s favorite hymn. The chorus says, “Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.” It’s not just the people we want to hold in our heart. It’s not just the people who have earned the right to be in our heart. It is not just the people who agree with us. It is not just the people who think we are awesome. I will hold all of God’s people in my heart.

Our intentions are not built, our intentions are uncovered. Our intentions are those core things that we believe and feel that live deep within us. How we treat each other flows from that core. Jesus loved and he showed us how to hold all people in our heart. We are called to especially look for those people that nobody else seems to be loving. And we know that God brings us renewal and redemption and God can help heal our intentions when our intentions are not so kind and loving. God can help heal us when we have been generous because we knew someone would notice and we were generous because we thought it would give us influence. God can help bring new life to our intentions.

We are all connected. And when I condemn someone, I condemn myself from the inside out. And we are so willing to blame anything besides ourselves for our actions. All of us play some part for the wickedness that wrecks our lives. Our social, familial, and economic systems perpetuate our sinfulness.

Last week I was in the checkout line at Walmart, my cart filled with items for school lunches and the person behind me had an armful of boxes of ammunition. I looked back, realized what the person was holding and I didn’t move. I didn’t say anything, I didn’t breathe funny, I was not going to ruffle any feathers. I was not going to ask this person what we are doing about gun violence in America. I was not going to talk about raising the price of ammunition. I was not going to make any proposals to actually do something to stop the insanity of gun violence in America. I was going to put my head down, close my eyes to the reality around me, and leave the Walmart and the person purchasing boxes and boxes of ammunition far away from my mind.

When the terrible tragedy happened live on-air this week with the murder of reporter Alison Parker and photographer Adam Ward, I could pretend it didn’t happen because I refused to watch the video. And I can pretend that alcoholism doesn’t affect my life, or drug abuse, or neglect, but it does and until I can heal my inhibitions and say something and do something, I am playing a part in the wickedness that is in our world.

May God heal my intentions and help me to love others.

It feels like hurting others or being hurt by others seems an inevitable part of life. Our good intentions for our lives and relationships can so easily go wrong when faced with our own inner pain. Jesus says we need to know wholeness on the inside, not just focus on appearing pure on the outside. For when we are healed from the inside out, our intentions are love.

Sister Joan Chittister in her book *Illuminated Life: Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light* said, “community…calls us to the kind of relationships that walk us through minefields of personal selfishness, that confront us with moments of personal responsibility, that raise us to the level of personal heroics, and lead us to the rigor of personal compassion day after day after day… It is when we recognize in the world around us the call of God to us that our response to the human race becomes the measuring stick of the quality of our souls. When anger rages in us unabated and unresolved, we obliterate the other in our hearts. When months go by and we never speak to our neighbors, never seek them out, never stir ourselves out of our hermitages to admit their existence, we deny creation. When advice is something we resist and questions are something we avoid in life, God has no voice by which to call us… The attention we give to another exposes our real sense of the breadth of the universe and stretches it beyond ourselves. We see in others the kind of commitment it takes to go on believing when our own belief falters. We look to others for the kind of vision that expands our own beyond the daily. We depend on others for the kind of wisdom that exceeds mere answers. We hold on to others to find the kind of love that make life rich with meaning, certain proof of the everlasting love of a God for whom there is no word.”

We are on the mend as we heal what ails us by inviting God into our hearts to heal our intentions. Let's commit ourselves to listen to our intentions this week. Are there things in us that Jesus would see as contaminants? What is behind the actions that we take this week? Jesus tells us to look within. The first step to change is to realize. So let us commit to listening to ourselves, to those thoughts and intentions that come from within.

1. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/08/pentecost-14-b-tradition/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/08/pentecost-14-b-tradition/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)