

***Living Into Wholeness***  
***Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23***  
***5 September 2021***  
***Sermon by Rev. Jessica McCrae***

I love people watching. Whether I'm in a park, or at the airport, or sitting in a hotel lobby, I love people watching. It is fascinating. And sometimes if you are lucky enough you can hear their conversations, which make them even more interesting. As I read the scripture in preparation for writing this sermon I was reminded of a conversation I overheard recently. My friend and I were grabbing breakfast in a local breakfast spot when two others came, sat down for

breakfast and started by talking about the changes they were making to their diets. With a menu filled with bacon, sausage, eggs they had made the healthy choices with fruit and oatmeal. They were feeling quite proud of themselves, talking about how much good these changes were doing them. They talked about how much they loved the blueberries and peaches that were now in season and how important these lifestyles changes were to keeping they happy and healthy

It wasn't long before the conversation changed though. It shifted from all the things they felt good about, to all the things others were

doing wrong. No one was safe from their critique from the Prime Minister, and the Premier, their thoughts on vaccines and how the reopening was handled, to the students working for Parks and Rec, to all the overweight people they knew, who had gained even more during the pandemic. They became rude and just nasty, their ignorance was shocking and suddenly these two people who had seemed so proud and earnest now appeared cruel and ugly. How quickly our perceptions can change when we see what is reflected from someone's heart.

That is really what this passage from Mark is all about today. It is a lesson we were taught as children, that idea that if you don't have anything nice to say you should probably not say anything. Which has its own pitfalls, but does remind us that the way we reflect what is in our hearts, the way we defend or degrade, the words of love or hate we put out there impact our lives, how we are perceived and how we are regarded. But as people of faith that is only half the story, how do the words we speak, the way we interact with the world around us, honour our relationship

with God? Will they break us, or lead us to wholeness?

In this reading from Mark, Jesus has a confrontation with the Pharisees who take issue with some of Jesus' disciples who are eating with defiled hands. As you may remember the Pharisees lived by some very strict rules on just about everything - dietary laws, how business could be conducted, clothing laws, washing, what could and could not be done on the Sabbath. But in the eyes of Jesus this did not make them more faithful, or better than Jesus' friends, who may not be following the laws the Pharisees

believed were important, but who still carried love for God in their hearts. He quotes from the prophet Isaiah, "people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, in vain they worship me, teaching the rules of humanity as divine rules."

I'm sure you can think of people, we all can, who profess to be people of great faith but you'd never know it from their actions, those people who make you wonder if we are all trying to learn about and build relationship with the same God. You know, those people who put more weight on their interpretation of rules than

the instruction to love our neighbours, share what we have; those who are quick to judge others but resist looking at themselves.

Unfortunately the issue that Jesus had with the Pharisees is one that many still have with organized religion, or the more precisely *the organized religious*. We do not always live as people who really know God – but hopefully, more often than not, we live on a path seeking to live into wholeness.

What does that even mean anyway, to be on a path seeking to live into wholeness? That is probably more to the point of what Jesus is

getting at today. In the eyes of the Pharisees, being good – being right with God, righteous, being whole - means following the rules. It is very black and white, and relates to a way of being in relationship with God that is very legalistic. If you do these things – if you eat certain foods, if you say prayers at certain times in certain places, if you attend worship, if you tithe, you will experience wholeness. But Jesus didn't understand faith, or relationship with God this way. And in fact, while the rules that the Pharisees impose seem very strict and rigid, Jesus calls us to even more.

There is nothing outside a person that can defile them by going in, but the things that come out are what defile.

Instead of giving us a list of what to do to be on the right track, Jesus reminds us of the things that can defile us, or bring us further from the path God wants for us – things that we do, say, inflict on others ... things that come from us.

In a way, it kind of makes you wish you had the Pharisees book of laws to follow, it seems so much more clear cut, so much more black and white. But we do have some pretty clear guidance on how to live our life – it isn't clearly

stated in this reading, but it is eluded to when Jesus talks about having our hearts close to God. Remember that teaching of Jesus that tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart and soul and mind, and then to love our neighbour as ourselves? It is from the gospel of Matthew, and that commandment is greater than all the others, greater than all the laws of the Pharisees, because when that is taken into ones heart – loving God with every ounce of our being, and loving our neighbours as ourselves – being empathetic, respectful, compassionate –

everything else will fall into place. It can't help but fall into place.

And we will be good. Not good in a value sense. Not good in a judgment sense, but good as in whole.

And that was probably the thing that struck me the most about those two in the diner that morning. Once I moved through my anger and disgust at the conversation they were having, and the judgments they were making on people, I just felt kind of sad for them. Because it seems to me that you just can't possibly be experiencing wholeness when you hold such anger about

people in your heart. And I don't say that so much as judgment, because most of us are not whole ourselves, but there is a difference between being on a path to wholeness, and wallowing in brokenness.

Jesus' disciples that day, who made the etiquette faux pas that set off this whole discussion with the Pharisees were on a path toward wholeness, less concerned with the rules of the elders and more concerned with the new revelations God was making in their lives. Their hearts were open and they sought to learn more.

May all our hearts be open. May we not get bogged down in the judgments of others, but be aware of the ways that God is calling to us, giving us opportunities to find wholeness in our lives and loving right relationship with others. May each day and each experience bring us closer to the love of our God, and may we always find ways to point to it in our words and our actions. Amen.