**Mark 7:1-13 (ESV)**

**1**  Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, **2** they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. **3** (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders, **4** and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches. ) **5** And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” **6** And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,   
“ ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; **7** in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ **8** You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” **9** And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! **10** For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ **11** But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God) — **12** then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, **13** thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

**“Hiding Behind Tradition”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. When you hear the word “tradition” what comes to mind? The immediate response is something old and out of date. Regrettably, this word typically has a negative sound. Some have used it to make unwilling people get with the times. Many a battles especially in the church have happened by drawing those lines of traditional verse contemporary. However, as much as people today want to cast off tradition no one can escape it. For example, as schools are now back into full swing. Families settle into their regular routines. They have a pattern set up for their life. This happens year after year. Likewise, all churches have traditions the moment you step into the door no matter how modern they claim to be.

As we here live in the pattern of the church year. The Pentecost season seems to drag on forever. It is easy during this time to go through the motions as people also do in married life. Yet, in our Gospel reading, we stumble upon the text showing none should underestimate the Pharisee. Even after Jesus dealt with them, they had influence. As one book notes,

“The enduring significance of the Pharisees for Judaism lies…in their survival as the most viable leadership after the destruction of the temple. Almost all forms of modern Judaism trace their lineage through the Pharisees” (Bible Dictionary 824).

Far beyond a mere group of Jews in a certain time and place, the spirit of the Pharisee is alive and well. Since no one can escape having traditions, it means all are susceptible to a self-righteous way of life. No wonder the tradition of Jesus is always to turn hearts to trust in Him.

The problem was not tradition, but with the Pharisees who wanted to trump the work of God. The presence of Jesus, the proclamation of the Gospel, was a threat to their way of life. Rather than taking Him head-on, though, they were crafty enough to attack Jesus through His disciples. “Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.” The tradition of washing had Old Testament roots. Jesus would even establish baptism or washing as a means of grace to make all clean by the promise of His Word. What the Pharisees did was twist tradition to do their dirty work. It was to have a religion on the surface. The sinful nature always wants to glorify self over against the sinless Son of God.

What we have received is a benefit from past generations. The things they did, though with sinful hands, serve to help us in the family, as a society, and among the church. Our Lutheran Fathers, at the time of reformation unlike others still said, “We gladly keep the old traditions set up in the church because they are useful and promote tranquility, and we interpret them in an evangelical way, excluding the opinion which holds they justify” (Tappert 220:36). We can never forget that Christ alone makes us clean. The famous saying, “that is the way we have always done it” holds no value before this Savior. The behavior of holiness never makes us holy. If that were the case, how many other religions fit the same category? Instead, true righteousness begins and ends with Jesus. This is why we enter worship or begin any day in the Name of our Baptism. Just as confession is not a tradition, but is to hear Jesus forgive right from the start all that our sinful nature has wanted to twist in thought, word, and deed.

Instead of addressing their tradition, Jesus went straight to the truth. The Pharisees had the pattern of sinners no different from the past as witnessed by the prophets. He noted, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “ ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” It was the same old story that had judged Israel in the Old Testament. The Pharisees rigorous diet, special days, and 600 plus laws for life was just a facade. To hide behind the tradition of the elders meant they were just hiding from the Law. Pharisees were the filthiest kind of people because they had no trust in God, but only in the works of men. It even came at the expense of denying care to parents contradicting God’s Word of the fourth commandment. If they could do this in good conscience, then crucifying Christ was not going to be a problem for these sinners.

The love of Christ tells the truth to those standing behind tradition. No pattern will work in saving our life from the Law. Matter a fact, if we want to cast off the past to create new traditions. They too will still come with our sinful corruption. Hypocrisy abounds be it in families, society, and in the church. To opt for the traditions of men is to try to take charge of saving my life. The sinful nature tends to like man’s opinion more than what God offers. As a commentator describes,

“These Pharisees and scribes are dead, but their spiritual children have not departed them…There are many who are strict in matters of self-made commandments but who simultaneously reveal an inconceivable moral laxity in matter pertaining to the definite and revealed will of God” (Bul’s notes).

This happens when the rules for managing money is what ends up defining my morality. When parents make plans for the school year only to have no place for a spiritual life at church. We are guilty in trying to find ways around God’s Word just like the Pharisee.

The whole Gospel reading for today and the words we hear from Jesus is Law. Isaiah gives us a glimpse of good news for sinners when he said, “In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.” All these kind of people described were ones in need. Only by the proud Pharisees being broken would they see not defiled hands, but the better promise hidden in God’s Son, the Savior given for a sinful world. One man was no hypocrite. He handled the Law for all by His suffer and death. St. Paul, a Pharisee of Pharisees, who knew something about traditions says to the church, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures…” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). We need good things to pass on, but none of it surpasses what we have in this Savior.

Forgiveness comes by His hands so that our defiled hands can sit and receive His Supper. Life comes by His death so that what God says is a blessing and not a curse. Salvation comes by His Word so that no other ways of man compares to the way He freely saves to sinners. His sacrifice gives confidence in what the Word says more than tradition. It means to know marriage is good for a man and a woman not because I have failed or my parents divorced. The traditions of men never proclaim the fullness promised by God. Instead, the Word declares marriage good because this is already the perfect relationship Christ has with His bride the Church. The unbroken love of Jesus is how God binds us to love what He says. It is why we can love each other beyond the surface, but in forgiveness unlike the Pharisee. It even lets us appreciate tradition passed on to us, but never at the expense of our righteousness kept safe Christ. Shallow Pharisees will not dare to dive into the depths of the Gospel that goes to the cross. As the baptized you can, you must, you will for the Word wipes away false piety to place all before the Savior. The tradition of Jesus is always to turn hearts to trust in Him. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.