

Sermon "Consecrated Heart" Mark 7:1-8

If you read the Gospel of Mark from chapters 1 to 6, you will see that the fame and popularity of Jesus at that time greatly increased. Then, those who were opposed to Jesus came. Mark 7:1 tells us that those were the scribes and the Pharisees. They raised an issue, which was concerning the tradition of the elders. Here, elders refer to religious leaders of the Jews of the time. They refer to the elders in Judaism and the Scribes who we know as Rabbis.

It's still beneficial to listen to the elderly. They have the wisdom of life because they have many experiences. What to do when, what to look out for, and so on. I also had sobering moments as well as moments of encouragement when I was listening to the elderly. Especially regarding how they raised their children.

God gave the laws to the Israelites. And God took the people as the people of the covenant. But as time went by, more things were added to God's laws. These became "tradition of the elders." Some of their content are positive pertaining to the wisdom of life. But some are negative, merely restricting and burdening people. One example is recorded in Mark 7 concerning the requirement that one had to wash hands before eating. Of course, hand washing is a good thing, but the story of today's Bible isn't quite that simple.

We still wash our hands before eating. It became even more important since

the onset of COVID-19. It is one of the basic practices to prevent the viral infection. People frequently touch their faces with their hands. According to the research done on medical students in 2015 in New South Wales University in Australia, students on average touch their faces 23 times per hour. In 44% of the times, the students touched the areas of mucous membrane(*myo-ōkəs ˈmemᵢbrān*) such as eyes, nose, and mouth, even though they are the main channels for the virus to enter into our bodies.

Although it would be best not to touch our faces, we touch our faces often without realizing. That's why it's important to wash our hands properly. Nowadays due to COVID-19, washing hands has become complex or detailed. But do you know what it was like according to the elders' tradition during the time of Jesus? It laid out in exquisite detail the amount and quality of the water, the way you are supposed to pour that water, the person who is supposed to help, and the posture of your hands, and so forth. Although detailed explanations can help with our understanding, when details become excessive, we often forget about the purpose of these practices altogether.

In today's passage, Jesus's disciples ate without properly washing hands according to the tradition of the elders. This was a perfect opportunity for the Scribes and the Pharisees to capture, since they were keeping an eye on Jesus whose fame was on the rise. It was a "Got Ya" moment.

But Jesus says that the Scribes and the Pharisees were replacing the Word of God. They worked very hard to keep the tradition of human, but they made

the error of losing God's Word which is much more important.

As things become systematic and structured over time, a problem starts to appear. A typical downside of this tendency is the obsession with form and the neglect for substance. How unfortunate is it if someone has been going to church for a long time completing various programs at church and yet isn't able to experience God in his or her daily life?

During Jesus's time, there was a specific example of people prioritizing the tradition of elders over the Word of God. Korban is an example. In Mark 7:11, it says "devoted to God." Korban originally meant offering. Therefore, any offering has the word "Korban" in front of it. If it's a burnt offering, it would be "Korban Olah." If it's a peace offering, it would be "Korban Shelamim." If it's a sin offering, it would be "Korban Hatat."

Here is how Korban was abused. According to Jewish tradition at the time, fully grown children had the obligation to support their parents financially. Even in the Ten Commandments, it says "respect your parents." But to avoid this responsibility, it was believed that they could simply say the word "Korban" out loud in front of people. What did I say Korban was? It's an offering devoted to God! If they said "Korban," the money belongs to God and thus a holy object, so they did not have to give it to their parents.

Do you think they would have truly given that money to God? They didn't. Many people swore but their words remained empty words, and they kept

the money as their possession. Using the tradition of the elders, they cheated the commandment of God that required respecting their parents.

Jesus criticized those as hypocrites. Hypocrisy here refers to acting. It is hiding their true heart and intention and pretending. Regarding this, Jesus quotes Isaiah's prophecy: "These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught." This shows the corrupted reality of Judaism at the time of Jesus. Although Judaism had many complex rituals and strict rules, their hearts were far from God.

The passage that we read today is about Jesus emphasizing the consecration of heart to those who are hypocritical and who are focused only on the outward forms. External cleanliness is important! However, consecration of the heart is much more important than that of the external. People who have been going to church for a long time get used to the church life. There are some positives. But even when the center of heart is not clean, they learn to appear holy before others. We can deceive others, and we can deceive ourselves with no problem. But Jesus reprimanded the Pharisees and the Scribes for doing so!

Can my heart be clean when it is not washed by the blood of Jesus Christ of the cross? Do you truly desire the consecration of your heart by the blood of Jesus Christ of the cross? As Jesus says, "What goes into a man's mouth

does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'" Of course, we have to wash our hands before we eat. But the issue of washing hands is much less important than consecrating our hearts. Likewise, Jesus places his emphasis on our desire to consecrate our hearts with the blood of Jesus of the cross. God is still the living God who examines our hearts.

The title of today's sermon is the "consecrated heart." Consecration means holy and clean. Fundamentally, we cannot make our hearts clean with our religious efforts! Due to the prevalence of religious pluralism, it is often said that salvation is obtainable regardless of what you believe in. It is not our Christian faith. Consecration in the Bible is used to refer to things that are set apart from the worldly things and "devoted to God" or "became holy." In Hebrew, it's Godesh. It means "cutting or separating." It means "set apart from dirty things." It is not that we become consecrated for cutting the world from us ourselves. It is rather that reality of sin disappears as we draw near to God.

There is this hymn, "Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing pow'r? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Are you washed in the blood? In the soul cleansing blood of the Lamb? Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?"

Godesh in English Bible is translated as "holy." The word consecration cannot be used apart from God. Exodus 15:13 also says that where God is the holy place. The word "consecration" as used in the Bible often refers to the relationship between God and God's people. Levites who served before God had to be consecrated. It was easy for God's people to lose their consecration when they were not being faithful to God. In other words, only when we are near God, we can be consecrated. The meaning slightly changed in the New Testament. While "consecration" in the Old Testament was regarding the bodies, it captured the issue of the heart in the New Testament; the New Testament makes the point that Christians ought to have a consecrated heart that is undivided, of one accord.

The same idea can be received differently depending on the person presenting it. Most of us probably have some experience like this. The sales of the same product often depend on the model in the ads. Some say that in the art of persuasion, it is the person who delivers the message that's more important than the content of the message. This is why we, as deliverers of God's message, need to live lives that are set apart and consecrated. When your daily life is full of praise and thanksgiving, people will start to pay attention to the story you share. However, when your life is full of complaints and your face is full of anxiety, disappointment, and fear, people would point fingers at you, upon knowing that you go to church. I sincerely desire and bless that your daily life is filled with the right worship, prayer, and the Word of God. May it be filled with thanksgiving and praise.

Let me conclude this message with a story.

Those who have children probably have had this conversation at a dinner table. "Mom, I am not gonna eat!" "Dad, if I eat some veggies, what will you buy me?" In reality, it's the kids who will become hungry if they don't eat. It's them who become healthy when eating vegetables. But in these ironic conversations, moms and dads always lose. They try to get them to eat, and they reward their kids for eating veggies. Why is that?

It's love! Similarly, we often have weird conversations with God in prayers. If we think about it, it's for us, but we ask God to lead us and bless us. I am grateful. Because God loves us so much, we still live as God's children.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, earlier I told you about Korban. This word is derived from CAROV, which means "near" distance-wise. Because the word Korban, which means offering, comes from this word, it means "to draw near." In other words, offering rightly perceived is "drawing near to God." When you eat, it's important whether you wash your hands or not, whether you dress up or not, or whether you did your hair or not, whether you put on some make-up or not. But more important than these is that you experience the washing of Jesus's blood on the cross each time you worship Him and that you live as beloved children of God, and have weird conversations with God in prayers with thanksgiving and joy. Fairfield Grace, May God's grace and peace be with you and your family, and your business, and your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.