

That Which Defiles

15 Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, ²“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

³ Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ ⁵ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’ ⁶ they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

⁸ “‘These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

⁹ They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.’”

¹⁰ Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. ¹¹ What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”

¹² Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

¹³ He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.

¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

¹⁵ Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”

¹⁶ “Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. ¹⁷ “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸ But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”

The Faith of a Canaanite Woman

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”

²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

²⁶ He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

²⁷ “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the complaint that the Pharisees and teachers of the law have against Jesus’ disciples? Why do you think they bring this complaint to Jesus?

2. How does Jesus answer this complaint? Why do you think he does this?

3. What is Jesus' question to the Pharisees? What is his accusation against them?

4. How does Jesus then refute their accusation against his disciples about washing hands to the crowds there?

5. What does his disciples report to Jesus regarding his response to the Pharisees and his teaching to the crowd about them? What is Jesus' response?

6. What does Peter ask Jesus? What is his response?

7. What does Jesus teaching about what makes us clean or unclean help us to interpret the message found in the story about the Canaanite woman?

DISCUSSION:

- 1. Commentators note that Matthew's gospel is written to early Jewish Christian believers which were in conflict with the Jewish synagogues, led by the Pharisee sect of Judaism. How might this help us interpret the message shared in this story?**

- 2. All religions have traditions and rituals. Why are these important? What is their purpose?**

- 3. The Old Testament Laws and teachings devote much to defining what is clean and unclean for the Hebrew people to observe. Why do you think God gave them (and us) these rules?**

- 4. Jesus noted that what violates a person is not what he or she ingests, but what comes out of one's mouth, that which comes out of the heart in word and deed. What are some ways that we may see people defile themselves today?**

- 5. What are some traditions and rituals that are near and dear to your heart, that are important as expressions of your faith which you feel strongly ought to be observed and preserved?**