

Title: Watch Your Mouth!

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, you blessed us and cursed us with emotions and you also gave us the ability channel our emotions in ways constructive and destructive; bless us with your love that we may wrap our emotions with your love and bring this world into your harmony in Christ Jesus, through whom we pray. Amen.

Matthew 15:10 opens after Jesus has a disagreement with the Pharisees, the religious authorities from Jerusalem. Jesus' disciples did not wash their hands before eating, which was counter to Jewish tradition. In Jesus' time, fingers were made before forks. Except for our parents, we do not have a rule to wash our hands before eating. Our parents taught us that, because it is a really good idea and we stay healthier if we do. Now, I do not want to cast aspirations on the disciple's parents. They were likely good people. I would blame the disciples for wanton disregard for their parent's wisdom.

There was already a crowd gathered around Jesus. Having failed to embarrass Jesus in front of the crowd, Jesus sidelines the Pharisees and speaks directly to the crowd. What Jesus says next may not have sit well with Mary. Jesus says that what goes into your mouth does not defile, it is what comes out of your mouth. I can almost hear Mary thinking, "I taught you better than that. Wash your hands before eating."

There were disciples who must have been close to the Pharisees when Jesus said that. They report to Jesus that the Pharisees were offended by what Jesus said. Jesus responds by implying that the Pharisees are not from God. The Pharisees are the blind leading the blind. If someone blind leads others that are blind, they will fall into a pit. More the pity for them.

Obviously, there were at least some disciples who respected the Pharisees and what the Pharisees said mattered. Now they are faced with an awkward choice: continue to follow Jesus and reject the Pharisees or continue to honor the Pharisees and question what Jesus says or just stop following Jesus. There were likely a few that agonized over which direction to take.

I believe Peter intuited that this was a problem for some and asked Jesus to elaborate. So, Jesus gets graphic. What we eat goes to the sewer, except for most foothill residents who have septic tanks. For Jesus' hearers, latrine would have been a better translation.

Declaring that what goes into the mouth is clean, Jesus says that what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart. This is what defiles us. Jesus then lists the things that come from our hearts: evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, and slander. I couldn't help but notice that Jesus' list corresponds positively to the Ten Commandments.

I think that Jesus and the Pharisees are on different pages as to what defile means. What is the connection between physical ritual purity and spiritual purity. It seems that physical ritual purity is important to the Pharisees. For Jesus, purity is less concerned by our spiritual practices than it is with our moral code. Purity comes from how we treat others. Defilement comes from our wrong actions and words.

Which brings us to the gentile, Canaanite woman. In Jesus' culture, she has three strikes against her: 1) she is not a Jew, 2) she is a foreigner, which makes sense because Jesus is in a foreign land and Canaanites are blamed in the Bible for leading the Israelites from God, and 3) she is a woman. In Jesus' culture, women had no voice. The woman is also unaccompanied by a male, a social taboo.

Jesus ignores her request to heal her daughter. This protects her and Jesus from shame and scandal. Jesus, in this case, is an outstanding first century Jew. *Yet she persisted.* This is driving the disciples crazy and they demand that Jesus do something about it. When Jesus speaks, it is to reject the woman's request.

Jesus, at this point, believes his mission is only to the Jews. It is curious that if this is what Jesus believes, why is he in foreign territory? Jesus says, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." (Matthew 15:26, NRSV) In other words, Jesus' blessings are not to be taken from the Jews and given to gentiles for whom Jesus refers to as dogs.

In a great rhetorical retort, "she said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.'" (Matthew 15:27, NRSV) Jesus

was impressed at the faith of this gentile, Canaanite woman and her daughter was healed instantly. Jesus accepted correction from someone below his status.

Jesus was willing to admit he was wrong and do the right thing. What came out of Jesus' mouth in his rebuke of the foreigner was not right and he was caught in an embarrassing metaphor. Jesus didn't break anything that was on the bad list that he gave his disciples, but his initial response was not a loving one. Yet love won out through the woman's persistence.

What comes out of our mouths defile us. Jesus rejects and insults a woman in need. Everyone one of us has said things that we either instantly or later regret.

For most of us, there is a filter between our hearts and our mouths. We might harbor, at times, something from Jesus' list, or least, something milder. For example, we might not have murder in our heart, but we would like to slap somebody. So, we might not give that slap or even mention it because we have that filter. Still, the thought and the feelings are still in our heart.

This filter is very important. The human race might not have a large population now without that filter. But some people's filters don't work well. They say and do things that harm others. Please remember, Jesus implied that everyone has defiled hearts. Jesus exempted no one. But what we do and say can escape being defiled if we utilize our filters.

We get angry. Even Jesus got angry. Even Jesus needed correcting, even from a gentile Canaanite woman. There is righteous anger that compels us to right wrongs. And there is destructive anger that leaves people hurt, devastated, and even angry also.

Then there is hate. Hate eats at the soul. It destroys the soul. If not corrected, it leads to evil. Everyone hates someone or something sometime. It is a cruel twist on the Dean Martin song, "Everybody Loves Somebody Sometime." Where hate gets out of hand is when people hate a group or groups of people. Most of these people find like-minded others to help fuel their hateful feelings and ideas. It is almost like they know this might not be right so they need others to affirm that their hate is righteous.

I have been a member of the Southern Poverty Legal Center for several years. They send me their publications listing the locations and activities of hate groups. I remember telling Suzie last year after one of those publications arrived in the mail that I hate reading it because it makes me angry. It made me angry that there were people who were doing heinous acts against other people. I also felt hopeless and helpless that more cannot be done to stop these people.

The counter demonstrators at Charlottesville decided not feel hopeless. They were going to confront evil and hate. Their righteous indignation against hate was personified by Heather Heyer. She was determined to have a voice. She was persistent. And for that, she lost her life.

We live in politically blue California. Liberalism reigns supreme here. Yet, California has more hate groups than any other state in the country. Some of those groups are not far from here.

Violence solves nothing, whether it be Charlottesville, Barcelona, Paris, London, Turku, or anywhere else.

Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said last Sunday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, “Through the way of love, he has shown us the way to be right and reconciled with the God and Creator of us all. Through his way of love, he has shown us the way to be right and reconciled with each other as children of God, and as brothers and sisters. In so doing, Jesus has shown us the way to become the Beloved Community of God. St. Paul said it this way: ‘In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself’ and now he has entrusted us with ‘the message of reconciliation.’” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Presiding Bishop Curry recommended a program from the Diocese of Atlanta called God’s Beloved Community. Their vision includes this, “Racism is an issue that has to be faced in a straight forward and courageous manner and what better place for this work to occur than in the church where we all have a commitment to someone larger than ourselves who can help us find the courage to travel on the road to racial healing and reconciliation.”

We cannot do this by ourselves. Community can reign over chaos. This can only be accomplished through the love of God, taught to us by Jesus, with the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Our weapon against hate is love.

Text: **Matthew 15:10–28** (NRSV)

<sup>10</sup> Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, “Listen and understand: <sup>11</sup> it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” <sup>12</sup> Then the disciples approached and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?” <sup>13</sup> He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. <sup>14</sup> Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. <sup>15</sup> And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.” <sup>16</sup> But Peter said to him, “Explain this parable to us.” <sup>17</sup> Then he said, “Are you also still without understanding? <sup>18</sup> Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? <sup>19</sup> But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. <sup>20</sup> For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>21</sup> These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”

<sup>22</sup> Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>23</sup> Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” <sup>24</sup> But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” <sup>25</sup> He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” <sup>26</sup> But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” <sup>27</sup> He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” <sup>28</sup> She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” <sup>29</sup> Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly. <sup>30</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>c</sup> Other ancient authorities lack *of the blind*

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version\*](#). (1989). (Mt 15:10–28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.