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## JESUS IS FOR OUTSIDERS

Homily for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, 2. Sept., A.D. 2012 ✕  
St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA

**Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23** 1Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, 2they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. 3(For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; 4and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) 5So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" 6He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; 7in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' 8You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition." 14Then he called the crowd again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand: 15there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile. 21For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, 22adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. 23All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Human beings prefer to live in groups.

We are social animals, we might say; we like to get together.

However, some people get left out: they're different, or they've been badly hurt and just choose to be by themselves; they're outsiders.

But I believe we all have a deep down need to belong., to not be outsiders.

Alfred Adler, the Viennese psychiatrist who broke with Freud in 1911, coined the term "Social Interest" [*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*] and thus became a founder of the field of Social Psychology.

He and his followers made belonging to social networks -- like the family, the school class, the gang on the corner -- central to their understanding of human personality.

Jesus is talking to us about belonging in today's Gospel.

He doesn't disapprove of our need to belong, but he points out some troubling facts.

So I ask:

### **Part I. What Keeps Us From Belonging?**

#### **Point 1, How far would you go to be "cool" or "with it" -- an insider?**

Would it be going too far to say that Jesus was "cool?"

People flocked to him -- he said some daring, new things -- it got peoples' attention.

Even the Pharisees and some of the scribes were attracted to him.

Then they noticed -- oh,oh -- the disciples hadn't washed up before dinner.

Now if there ever was an "in-crowd" it was the Pharisees, and they had their rules.

If you wanted in you had to "observe the tradition of the elders," which included washing hands, washing what you got from the market, and, **v. 4, "also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles."** 5So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

What a question! So if you want to belong, if you want to "be cool," you must follow the rules of cleansing, according to them.

These rules are what we would today call cultic rituals.

We follow the traditions of our elders in this church -- cultic rituals like kneeling at times, standing at others, making the sign of the cross, etc.

But how far would we go in demanding that of our newer members, our youth, our visitors?

We must ask ourselves, what do these cultic or liturgical rituals really mean to us?

### **Point 2, Following certain rituals in order to be OK or “cool” is dangerous**

Cultic rituals in order to be clean (cool, with it, an insider) inevitably means shutting out those who are ‘not-OK’, not clean, not cool -- it’s a kind of prejudice.

What causes us to do that?

It is our inner malady, our ongoing problem: we all have unclean hearts.

**V. 6 [Jesus] said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; 7in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'**

Someone obviously needing cleansing, but clinging to the traditional, cultic rules in order to be clean is dangerous because at its root it is faith in rules and rituals, which is simply false faith. It makes hypocrites of us.

### **Point 3, False faith makes us outsiders to the Kingdom**

I hear Jesus using harsh labels like: **hearts far from God; vain worship; setting aside God's actual commands.**

He was judging the Pharisees and called them hypocrites, no better than outsiders.

Do you remember that Mark’s is the “Ochlos” Gospel?

He uses that Greek word three times in this chapter -- it is usually translated, not as the technical term that it is, by the words ‘crowds’ or ‘multitudes.’

What ‘ochlos’ really means is ‘the rejected folks’, the ‘outsiders’, the ones crowded out of society by the social system itself.

Here Jesus is telling the Pharisees that they are also the ‘ochlos’ -- outsiders to the Kingdom -- even though they are social insiders, part of the church establishment. It’s because their faith is fixed on falsehoods -- they are teaching human doctrines & are not really clean in the eyes of God, a terrible spot to be -- for them and for us.

**So, Part I. What Keeps Us From Belonging? Well, 1.) How far would you go to be “cool” or “with it” -- an insider? 2.) Following certain rituals in order to belong or be “cool”? That’s dangerous, because, 3.) False faith makes us outsiders to the gracious Kingdom of God.**

### **What we need is, Part II, A NEW PATH TO BELONGING**

#### **Point 1, That path leads to the cross.**

As I listened to the Republican Convention I noticed that the speeches tended to have two parts -- one part that told how bad things are and the second, how they were going to fix it -- they were proposing merely human solutions.

Our Lord proposes the one Divine solution that fixes our one worst problem: how to get out of this valley of tears and death alive so we can live with God forever.

**V.14 “...[Jesus] called the crowd [the ‘ochlos’, the ‘crowded out’] again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand:...'”**

When Jesus says, “Listen to me” he points to himself as the source of Good News for all the crowded out, all the rejects, even and especially those whom God rejects.

Jesus is the Messiah for the ‘ochlos’ folks by becoming an ochlos, a reject, himself.

We know that there were seven words of Jesus from the cross, right?

Mark records one, and only one, word from the cross in his passion story.

That word, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” is a cry of an outsider, not belonging -- Jesus becomes an ‘ochlos,’ a reject, one like us, on that cross for us.

But when he died there, the confession we hear about who he is, “Truly this man was God’s Son” (Mk. 15:39), was a confession coming from the Roman centurion in charge of the crucifixion! ! . . . . an ‘ochlos,’ of course.

#### **Point 2, Now The Rejected One invites us to belong**

The “ochlos Messiah” invites us to pay attention to his words, “listen to me.”

Isn't that a beautifully simple way to say what faith is? "Listen to me, trust me."

I hear a promise in that invitation, namely, that He will cleanse us.

Not by all the cleansing rituals of a humanly devised system, but by the cleaning action of the powerful Word of God, the Word that promises the cleansing action of the forgiveness of our sins.

Faith in Jesus is the mechanism of transfer whereby his forgiveness become ours.

When unclean ones like us listen to him in our liturgy, he renders us clean.

### **Point 3, When we belong we insiders now change our wicked ways**

Our Lord pictures those wicked ways: **21For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, 22adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. 23All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."**

Quite a laundry list there of wicked ways, but almost in each case we can uncover a desire to belong, even in the anti-social acts of theft, murder, deceit, slander.

E.g., one of Adler's followers wrote a book about the fact that children have a powerful need to get that good feeling of belonging. He titled it, *Children: the Challenge*.

He identifies the child's mistaken ways of getting that need met, by being a clown, or stubborn, or throwing temper tantrums -- ways to keep parents busy with them so they feel like they're a part of things -- crazy, I know -- but that's why kids do it.

Parents, grandparents, need to assure children that they belong by showing love and acceptance. And don't we all need acceptance?

Let me close with a story about the need for acceptance, belonging:

#### Puppies for sale

A farmer had some puppies he needed to sell. He painted a sign advertising 4 pups, and was nailing it to a post on the edge of his yard. As he drove the last nail into the post, he felt a tug on his overalls. He looked down into the eyes of little boy.

"Mister," he said, "I want to buy one of your puppies."

"Well," said the farmer, as he rubbed the sweat off the back of his neck, "These puppies come from fine parents and cost a good deal of money."

The boy dropped his head for a moment. Then reaching deep into his pocket, he pulled out a handful of change and held it up to the farmer. "I've got 39 cents, is that enough to take a look?"

"Sure," said the farmer. And with that he let out a whistle. "Here, Dolly!" he called. Out from the doghouse and down the ramp ran Dolly followed by four little balls of fur.

The little boy pressed his face against the chain link fence. His eyes danced with delight.

As the dogs made their way to the fence, the little boy noticed something else stirring inside the doghouse.

Slowly another little ball appeared, this one noticeably smaller. Down the ramp it slid. Then in a somewhat awkward manner, the little pup began hobbling toward the others, doing its best to catch up....

"I want that one," the little boy said, pointing to the runt of the litter. The farmer knelt down at the boy's side and said, "Son, you don't want that puppy. He will never be able to run and play with you like these other dogs would."

With that the little boy stepped back from the fence, reached down, and began rolling up one leg of his trousers. In doing so he revealed steel braces running down both sides of his leg attaching themselves to a specially made shoe.

Looking back up at the farmer, he said, "You see sir, I don't run too well myself, and he will need to belong to someone who understands."

With tears in his eyes, farmer reached down and picked up the little pup. Holding it carefully, he handed it to the little boy.

"How much?" asked the little boy. "Thirty-nine cents will do just fine," answered the farmer.

We might think of ourselves as the runt of the litter, or not, but we all need to belong to someone who understands. Our Lord Jesus understands, and we belong to him.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**S.D.g.**

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