
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."

"Are You a Pharisee, a Scribe, or a Disciple?"

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus who is the Christ. Amen

One of my favorite plays is Fiddler on the Roof. In the opening scene, you hear that famous music and you see a fiddler on a roof, then Tevye walks onto the stage, points to the fiddler and say: "A fiddle on the roof. Sounds crazy, no? But in our little village of Anatevka, you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof, trying to scratch out a pleasant and simple tune without breaking his neck. It isn't easy. You may ask, why do we stay here if it's so dangerous? We stay because Anatevka is our home. And

how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in a word --
TRADITION ----. Because of our traditions, we've kept our
balance, for many, many years. Here in Anatevka we have
traditions for everything -- how we eat, how to wear clothes. For
instance, we always keep our heads covered and always wear a
little prayer shawl. This shows our constant devotion to God. You
may ask, how did this tradition start? I'll tell you -- I don't know.
But it's a tradition. Because of our traditions everyone knows who
he is and what God expects him to do"

Then the whole village comes out and sing that haunting
song, Tradition.

Traditions for Tevye were important even though he didn't
know why or where the traditions came from. They were
important. This fact is seen throughout the whole play. Tevye was
a religious man in that he kept the traditions even when they did
more harm than good.

I began this sermon talking about traditions and Tevye,
because that is exactly what our Gospel lesson is about this
morning, keeping the traditions of the elders. As it says in our
Gospel lesson: And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why
do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders,
but eat with hands defiled?"

Then Jesus goes on to point out to these men there is a difference in traditions or religion. Jesus says that is what he came for. Jesus came to establish a relationship with Him, so one could worship the Father not the traditions of the past. Being religious means it is an end in itself. Christianity is a means to an end, a relationship with Jesus Christ. That is the difference between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. The Pharisees turned what was supposed to be worship of God into an end in and of itself. They were religious for religious sake.

But Jesus is saying worship of God is a means to an end, a relationship with Him plus a relationship with your fellow human beings. So, the question can be asked of us. Am I a religious person, where religion is an end in and of itself, or am I a Christian person where I am led by a relationship of Jesus and God and my neighbor.

Another way of asking it is this: "Are you a Pharisee, a Scribe, or a Disciple?"

Let us explore that question in the next few moments.

We must understand the Jewish law that they were working from. The law was given to the nation of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy and Leviticus. But it was given in broad principles so that the people might have some freedom in interpreting the law

for themselves. But about 500 years before Jesus was born, a group of people emerged, the Scribes, who were interested in upholding the letter of the law as they saw it. So, they developed their own moral law, or the law of the elders, to put exactness into these broad principles. Over the course of time, the broad principles of the law became lost to the exact rules and regulations that were being poured out by these Scribes.

For example, the hand washing law became something like this: Before one ate, one must pour 1 1/2 eggshells of water over his hands, but not just in any manner, but in this prescribed manner. He must hold the hands with the finger-tips upwards and pour the water over them until it ran down his wrists; he must then cleanse the palm of each hand with the fist of the other; he must then hold the hands with the fingertips pointing downwards and pour water on them from the wrists downwards so that it ran off at the fingertips. This was not a matter of hygiene; it was a matter of ritual, even if the hands were spotless, it must be done. To do it was to please God, to fail to do it was to sin.

Religion became to the Scribes and the Pharisees an end to itself. Jesus says to the Scribes and Pharisees "You leave the commandment of God and hold fast the tradition of men."

Jesus saw that the law was being used to turn people away

from God by being so exact, instead of it being used to bring people to God to see his love and mercy. Jesus goes on to say that it is not what is outside of a person that makes that person unclean, but it's what is in his or her heart that matters. He says: "Hear me, all of you, and understand there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him."

Jesus saw that religion was being used to escape the true religion, the worship of God. The religious leaders were using the law of men to gain respect, position, and wealth over the people. They used the law to have power over people, instead of showing the people how the law can help them to find God in their lives. Jesus was freeing the people from the tyranny of the externals and giving them a freedom to live with the law of love in their hearts.

Religion became an end unto its self. And there are people today that turn religion into an end, not a relationship with Jesus.

As Pastor John Brokhoff says in his book Faith Alive, "the pietists are long on their rituals but short on their performance of what they claim to believe."

Many pietists can talk well, but as seen in this fable they don't perform.

"A man went to heaven and to his surprise saw a shelf covered with human tongues. The heavenly guide told him, 'These are the tongues of people who spoke sweet words without virtue, who said what was right but never did anything to follow their words. So, their tongues have come to heaven and the rest of them is somewhere else.'"

It is only a means in and of itself, you talk about what you are going to do and not follow through.

Like Tevye, many people don't know why they follow certain rituals. It is Tradition.

But with Christianity, a Christian person has a religion that is not an end in itself. But it is a means to an end. It is service to God and humankind. A Christian is one who is not only a hearer but a doer of the word. Prayer must end in service. Worship leads to service. Laws are made to help and serve other.

Religion as practiced by Jesus meant for people to come into a relationship with Him. That relationship would lead to a stronger relationship with the Father. Religion as seen in the life of Jesus leads somewhere. It leads to Jesus. It leads to the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts. Being a Christian is being as Dr. Martin Luther would like to say: "Christ-like in all areas of life."

For example: "A downtown businessman liked to have his

shoes shined every day. He always had the same little boy do it. The shoeshine boy always did a good job. One day the man asked him, 'How come you are so conscientious about your work?'

The boy was quite pleased with the compliment. In answer to the question, he looked up and said, 'Mister, I'm a Christian and I try to shine every pair of shoes as if Jesus Christ were wearing them.'"

The little shoeshine boy knew of the special relationship he had with Jesus. He knew doing his best was following the love Jesus had for him. He knew of that special relationship he had with Jesus; a relationship established on love not law.

He knew that Jesus puts each person in a special relationship with himself. For God enjoys, I think, the way each of us use the resources he has given us to worship him and to serve him through our neighbor. In some ways, this freedom to live in the principle of the law is more difficult than living by the letter of the law. Living by the letter of the law is easier because it is all spelled out in black and white. I don't have to take any responsibility for my own actions, if I follow the law, I can say it is good law, if I cannot follow the law, I can say it is a bad law.

But when I am given the freedom to express the principle of the law in my own way, then I must take the full responsibility

for my actions. I stand alone before God. I cannot blame anyone or anything for my failure to act, or for my failure for acting wrong. I have a greater responsibility, but I think it is in that very freedom to act and to fail that I am more confident of the grace of God in my life. For when I fail, I know his forgiveness is there for me. When I succeed, I know it is by the grace of God, the love that God has for me that has seen me through. I stand alone and naked by myself in the freedom of the law to worship God in my uniqueness. Then serve him by serving my neighbor. It is God and I in the world together.

Living by the principle of the law, means living by the love of Christ. I have freedom to risk, freedom to fail, freedom to live in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Love rules the relationship.

A closing story sums up what we have been trying to say; Young Tommy was saying his bedtime prayers as his mother was listening. She heard him say, "If I should die before I wake . . . If I should die . . .

"Wait a minute," said Tommy as he scrambled to his feet and ran downstairs. Within a short time, he was back; dropping to his knees again, he continued the prayer where he had left off.

When Tommy was safely tucked into bed, his mother asked why he had to run downstairs. He said: 'Mom, I thought about

what I was saying.

I had to stop and put all of Danny's wooden soldiers on their feet. I had turned them on their heads just to see how mad he'd be in the morning. If I should die before I wake, I wouldn't want him to find 'em like that." Amen