

PENTECOST 15

YEAR B

DEUTERONOMY 4:1-2, 6-9

JAMES 1:17-27

MARK 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

SEPTEMBER 1, 2, 2018

God gave the Ten Commandments and the entire word of God so that our lives would have order. The last verses of John 20 say that the word of God is given that we would come to believe that Jesus is the Christ and that we would come to life through believing. God gave the law so that we might be free in our relationships with God and with each other. It sounds strange to speak of the law and freedom in the same sentence but God gave us the law so we might live in harmony with each other and with God. James tells us this in James 1:25. The law of God gives us freedom to be the people of God. When we listen to the word of the Lord we have freedom to follow the Lord. The freedom comes because we no longer need to worry about our salvation or our lives. We do not worry because we have God's order and God's direction. With God leading us we have everything we need.

Moses teaches his people about remaining faithful to the word of the Lord. He cautions them to remain obedient to the Lord and to God's word. He tells them to not remove teachings from God's word and to not add teachings to God's word. The word of God is self-sufficient. It does not need to be add to. I don't have the right to change God's word just because I don't like it. I don't have the knowledge or the wisdom to do better than God did when the Lord gave us this word. God has given me the gift of proclamation. Even though I have gifts for ministry it is still God's word I am proclaiming and God's work I am doing. It is God's word I follow and it is God's word that guides me in the use of God's good and perfect gifts. Moses says the Israelites must keep or obey the commandments the Lord is giving them. Moses says this but how do you and I keep or obey them?

Mark 7:1, 2 **Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his**

disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them.

Most parents understand and even celebrate these words from Mark's gospel. How many mothers tell their kids to wash before eating? Our kids come in from outside or from playing video games and mom says wash your hands for dinner. Parents make this request of their kids, not because it is sinful if they don't, but because it is good to wash the germs from their hands. When I go into a restaurant restroom I feel better when I see the sign that instructs employees to wash before returning to work. If that sign is not there or if I see a cook or a server returning to work without washing I get suspicious of the restaurant and the food I am about to eat. Washing is important to us. It is important to our health and the prevention of disease. It seemed to have been important to the Pharisees too. It was so important that they made an issue about the disciples not washing before eating. Jesus was not against cleanliness and he was not against the law of God. Jesus was often accused of violating the law of God.

This issue of washing was about their ritual washing. For the scribes and Pharisees it was about getting it right according to their traditions. This ritual washing was not part of the Ten Commandments but was part of the oral tradition of the scribes and the elders. The ritual washing was used for all kinds of things. There was a certain way to wash that was acceptable to the tradition. This was the issue for the Pharisees as they observed the disciples eating with defiled hands. The Pharisees were not interested in freedom that comes through baptism into Christ. They were concerned that Jesus and his disciples were not observing their oral traditions. This ritual hand washing needed to be done every time a Jew returned from the marketplace or whenever they might have been made unclean because they touched the wrong person. It was not about the freedom of God but about the burdens placed by the Pharisees.

For some, our service of baptism is just another ritual we do in the church. It is a ritual washing, but it is more. By water and God's word we are made new. We are washed in water and set apart by the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave us the example of

baptism when he went to John the Baptist in the Jordan. Jesus identified with us so that we would also be identified with him. We are washed and we are set free to be people of God. This is a one-time life-giving event. Whether we baptize by immersion or by pouring water on a person coming to the water, it is God's life-giving invitation. Our God can take a teaspoon of water and make an ocean. God receives a baby into God's arms of mercy setting that baby apart at the beginning of his or her life. God received Jeremiah David Miller into God's special arms of mercy. Jeremiah is made new in this water. He will never need to wash in the waters of baptism again because God does not make mistakes when God receives us into new life.

Throughout the gospels we hear and read about the Pharisees and other leaders of the Jewish religion. They were angry with Jesus about breaking their laws and not observing their traditions. They were most upset about the Sabbath laws or the rituals of the Sabbath. They accused Jesus of not honoring God on the Sabbath.

There are certain parts of the Sabbath that are important to us as Christian people. The Ten Commandments say we are to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Keeping the Sabbath holy means we do not despise the teaching and preaching of God's word. We gladly hear God's word and we are obedient to it. We gather to worship God on the Sabbath and we honor God with our presence. We praise God with our music and we worship God in all parts of our lives. We declare and proclaim that Jesus is Lord and we thank God for giving us life. Truth in preaching and teaching is essential in our Christian observance of Sabbath. If our traditions and rituals are more important than God's word, then the rituals must go.

James 1:22-24 But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, ongoing away, immediately forget what they were like.

As Lutherans we have a certain tradition. We are a liturgical church. Our basic

teaching is that we are saved by grace through faith. The Lord Jesus taught this truth and the Apostle Paul took this gospel message to all the people and places he went. The entire gospel of Jesus Christ is about Jesus being our Lord and Savior. It is about life being ours through the blood of the Lamb. James embraced this truth, but he reminds us that merely hearing the word is not enough. We must also do what the Lord directs us to do. The Pharisees were self-proclaimed experts in the law of God, but they were not doers of the word. They were good at letting others be doers while they did the talking.

Jesus wants us to remain faithful to the teachings of the Lord but the most important and the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength and the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. I believe our traditions are good and I also believe they are acceptable to the Lord. They define who we are, but our traditions must never take the place of the word of the Lord. We must never allow our traditions to dictate the will of God or the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If God directs us to do a certain thing in our services we do what God says even when our tradition says we don't do things that way.

The Lord gave the Ten Commandments. They are God's gift to us. We have the entire word of God for our instruction and that we might have a closer walk with God. We are obedient to the word of God because it is God's word and it is for our building up and our growing up. You and I must observe the greatest law of all. We are to love. We love and we receive God's people into our lives and we care for one another just as the Lord cared for us. AMEN