

How many of you think that

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it would be great to have Jesus as your pastor ... I mean, if it were possible to have Jesus

be here in this 21st century,
come to the office and handle church affairs and business,
lead you in worship every week ,
give the sermon, serve you communion
visit you in the hospital
baptize and marry your kids, your grandchildren ... how many think it would be cool to have Jesus as your pastor?

LET'S HAVE A QUICK SHOW OF HANDS

That's a good number of us ... and let's face it, Jesus had a lot of good qualities

that we look for in a pastor – compassion
caring,
accepting of people,
he had a good prayer life and was spiritual,
he could preach in engaging ways that captured the crowd.

But, as I think about it, I'm not so sure

Jesus would have been a very good pastor ... and I say that because Jesus had a jarring honesty when it came to reading the human heart, human intentions, human motives.

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You see ... Jesus didn't put up with ulterior motives that people in churches can have in

seeking to be in control and exert their power.
He broke sacred rules ... rules that had been in force for centuries.
He despised church "turf-wars" where people seized ownership of God's grace and determined who and who wasn't within God's circle of grace.
He deplored the game playing of looking & acting holy & religious.
He hated the judgmental attitudes that people in faith communities can

sometimes have.

I've been a pastor for some time now and I know that "good" pastors put up with all that stuff to one degree or another ... I'm not so sure Jesus would have, and because of that, I'm not so sure he would have lasted very long in the local congregation.

AFTER ALL, HIS MINISTRY DID LAST ONLY THREE YEARS.

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What we witness today

in the reading from Mark's 7th chapter is Jesus' interaction with the church of his time and we witness in this reading his contentious relationship with the church leaders of his time.

THIS IS A RADICAL PIECE OF SCRIPTURE.

AND TO MAKE IT EVEN MORE RADICAL, JESUS IS SPEAKING TO THE FAITH COMMUNITY, TO THE ONES WHO SEE THEMSELVES AS KNOWING GOD; TO THE ONES WHO UNDERSTAND AND SEE THEMSELVES AS BEING A WORSHIPFUL AND SPIRITUAL BUNCH IN COMPARRISON TO THE NON- CHURCH GOERS.

To understand just how radical it is we need a

little history lesson ... the best way to understand Jesus now for our times is to make an effort to understand him in his own time and in his own context of 2000 years ago.

SO HERE WE GO ... JUST A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY



The Pharisees and their legal experts the Scribes represent one of many Jewish groups in 1st century Israel ... they are the descendents of the faithful Jews who struggled mightily to preserve the ancient traditions of Israel.

And their struggle was born out of times of exile ... times when the people were forced to live in foreign lands – and then after a time spanning hundreds of years, they were allowed to return home only to be conquered over and over again and forced to live under the domination of a conqueror's imperial rule.

In Jesus' time, Rome was that imperial rule ... and the Pharisees sought ways (as they had been doing over the centuries) ... they sought ways to preserve Israel's traditions and ritual practices, they did this in an effort to keep the faith of the people alive, to keep them unified in their belief of God.

And over time, the Pharisees became the authority on religious life and how it was to be lived ... they were the authority on the traditions and ritual practices that served the purpose of uniting the people and grounding their faith ... any threat to that authority would be challenged.

JESUS WAS ONE SUCH THREAT
and so
THE CHALLENGE WAS ON

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Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders ...

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We come upon a scene today in the reading from Mark

where Jesus and his disciples are participating in a religious meal and the Pharisees and Scribes notice something very much out of place, something not right ... they ask Jesus:

Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?

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Ritual cleaning was required for priests in the temple and then, by extension, all those participating in ritual meals ... REMEMBER, these practices developed over 100's of years and they were like the glue that held the people together in worship & faith.

So it is, that we hear today in this reading from Mark's 7th chapter the importance of washing cups,

pots, and

kettles ... it may sound strange to us today as a religious practice, but it's really no different than our traditions of doing

liturgy properly, doing

communion the right way,

ashes on Ash Wednesday,

singing Silent Night with a candle in our hand on Christmas Eve

These are important rituals & traditions ... they hold us together in faith and worship.

In the same way, these cleaning practices were important to the Jews, so Jesus' answer to the



Screen 7 (Why do your disciples not live according the tradition of

Pharisee's question the elders) ... his

answer is so radical that this is why I say, Jesus would not have been a very good pastor.

Now, before we hear what Jesus' answer was ... let me say this:

Good pastors would try to finesse an answer.

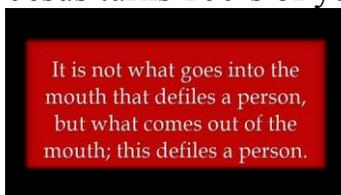
Good pastors would try to appease the questioner with some pastoral understanding, you know like ... *"I understand your concern ..."* or

"You are right about the tradition of the elders they are important ..." or

"It's true, my disciples are breaking with tradition here ..." and so forth.

Some pastors would use *"word smithing"* or *"spin"* to keep the peace & maintain unity.

Instead of doing any of that ... Jesus turns 100's of years of tradition and law (spoken of in the



Screen 8 "Listen to me, all of you, and

Scriptures) on its head, he says: understand: there is nothing

outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

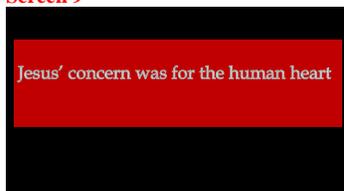
WHAT???

The Jewish people had developed (based on the Cleanliness Codes as dictated in the Book of Leviticus)

Mikveh rituals and Mikveh pools in which people would wash ridding themselves of impurities ... in this way they would remain holy, but Jesus says that holiness comes from within, not by washing your hands or washing the body in pools.

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Jesus' concern was for the human heart.

As I lived with this passage

throughout the week ... I came to understand it as a passage that reveals the thrust

of Jesus' ministry ... Some say that Jesus' main mission was to bring salvation to the world. Some say that his main mission was to usher in the Kingdom of God. Our reading today tells us that Jesus' ministry was about weeding the soil of the human heart.

Maybe salvation, the Kingdom of God, and changing the human heart
are different ways of talking about the same thing ... whatever the case, the core of Jesus'
ministry is about the state of the human heart.

Jesus was a healer, I think we all can agree on that, and

his healing reached far wider than just that of physical healing ... Jesus was also a healer of the
heart – HEART HEALING

This is the kind of healing that changes people's lives ... how they think about the world,
how they relate to others.

This is the kind of healing
that the world longs for when we speak of ending prejudice & racism,
of ending war and finding peace.

This is the kind of healing that curbs
our selfish drive to always get our share ... a drive that so much defines (in the world) our
relationship with one another & the relationships between groups of people & nations.

This is the kind of healing that helps us be forgiving and to accept forgiveness;
that helps us find peace even amid troubles and trials;

This is the kind of healing that places the presence of God into the very midst of our heart.

HEART HEALING ... HOW DOES IT HAPPEN ?

You know ... I have to take back,
recant,
bear the admission

that my initial assessment that Jesus probably would not have been a good pastor ... I have to
confess that I was dead wrong.

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Are not good pastors
called by God to be instruments of rejuvenation to foster a healing of the heart?

Are not good pastors
called by God to expose the places in the heart where it is not right within
where it is hardened to truth & compassion, and
where it is dying in the pools of its own blindness?

Are not good pastors
called by God to be voices of contrition recognizing error,

voices of intercession crying for mercy,
voices of supplication asking for healing.

Jesus is being the good pastor to the Pharisees and the scribes ... AND TO US.
He is being the good pastor when he says ... *“For it is from within the human heart that evil intentions come”*

Those words are the beginning of contrition ... recognizing error.
Those words are the beginning of intercession ... crying for mercy.
Those words are the beginning of supplication ... asking for healing.

Jesus is the good pastor

seeking to be the instrument of rejuvenation calling all of us to begin the journey of
allowing God to heal our hearts.

I was struck this week as I watched,

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listened to, and pondered all the happenings and words of eulogy
surrounding

the funeral service here in Arizona for senator John McCain.

Over and over again the words integrity,
honesty, listening,
caring,
seeking to bridge differences ... over and over these were the
ways in which John McCain
was being spoken of and
remembered.

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Talk about heart healing ... he played a central role in the US-Vietnam
reconciliation

process.

Reconciliation with the country he fought against,
was held prisoner in, and
tortured for five years ... not only was his own heart
healed but the hearts of two nations
began the process of healing too.

And as I listened to all this,
took it in, and
sought to write this sermon for today in the midst of it all, a sermon

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about heart healing
sense that America

... I could not help but to be confronted with the
is in need of heart healing these days.

I could not help but to think that this moment ... the moment
of Senator McCain's death and funeral service has brought a whole
nation face to face with a moment wherein we recognize more
deeply our need for a national heart healing.

And this heart healing isn't about politics and policies, it
isn't about democrats and republicans ... it's about the rhetoric coming
out of our mouths, the evil
coming from our hearts.

**"There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but
the things that come out are what defile."**

It begins with each one of us ... to heal the heart of a nation requires healing the heart of the
individual.

Jesus, the good pastor,

calls you (and me) today to allow him to begin the process of healing our hearts ... so that

what comes out of our minds,
our mouths,
our lives ... are not evil intentions,
slander, or even

Evil out of the Heart		A healed heart
Fornication	Theft	Love
Murder	Adultery	Caring
Avarice	Wickedness	Honesty
Deceit	Licentiousness	Integrity
	Envy	Compassion
	Slander	Service
	Pride	
	Folly	

indifference ...

Screen 13 but rather the

fruits of God's

spirit to bridge differences, not create them.

The fruits of Love,
Caring
Honesty
Integrity
Compassion,
Service.