

14th Sunday after Pentecost 2018

Mark 7:1-13

Hymns: 386, 357, 149, 300, 287, 437.

**Introit: Psalm 14.**

P The fool has been saying in his heart, "There is no God."  
C **They are corrupt. They have been acting abominably. There is no one who does good.**  
P The LORD has been looking down from heaven on the descendants of Adam  
C **to see if there is anyone who understands and who seeks God.**  
P Everyone has turned aside. Together they have become corrupt.  
C **There is no one who does good. There is not even one.**  
P Have all evildoers no knowledge?  
C **They devour my people as if they were devouring food. They have not been calling on the LORD.**  
P There they have been trembling in terror.  
C **For God is with the generation of righteous people.**  
P You people frustrate the plan of the poor person,  
C **but the LORD is his refuge.**  
P If only the salvation of Israel would come from Zion!  
All **When the LORD turns back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice! Let Israel be glad!**

**Collect:** Almighty and merciful God, defend your Church from all false teaching and error that Your faithful people may confess You to be the only true God and rejoice in your good gifts of life and salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Old Testament: Isaiah 29:11-19.**

**Epistle: Ephesians 5:22-33.**

**Gospel: Mark 7:1-13.**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, Mark 7:1-13.

**1 The Pharisees and some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. 2 They saw that some of His disciples were eating their food with 'defiled' hands, that is, without washing them. 3 For the Pharisees, like all other Jews, do not eat without washing their hands up to the wrist, to follow the tradition of their elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat without first washing; and there are many other things that they have had handed on to them and observe, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, brass pots, and couches. 5 The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him: "Why do Your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with defiled hands?"**

**6 He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites, as the Scriptures say: 'This people honours Me with its lips, but its hearts are far from me. 7 They worship Me in vain, since what they teach as doctrines are the commandments of men.' 8 You have abandoned the Commandment of God, but you hold on to the tradition of men."**

**9 He told them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the Commandment of God in order to establish your own tradition! 10 For Moses said: 'Honour your father and your mother!' and 'Let the person who speaks evil of father or mother be put to death!' 11 However, you say, 'If anyone says to his father or mother, "Anything by which I might have helped you is Corban (that is, a gift to God)," 12 then you do not let him do anything for his father or his mother any more. 13 You make the Word of God of no effect by the tradition that you have handed down. You also do many other things like that."**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

It seems as if the Gospel reading for this morning is an all out assault on tradition. Jesus scolded the Scribes and Pharisees for their holding so rigidly to tradition. He said, "You have abandoned the Commandment of God, but you hold on to the tradition of men." and "You have a fine way of setting aside the Commandment of God in order to establish your own tradition!"

But, tradition, in of itself, can serve a positive or a negative purpose, and sometimes tradition doesn't serve any purpose at all. I'm reminded of a story about a woman who was preparing a big whole bone in ham for her family's Christmas dinner. She began by taking a butcher knife and a hacksaw and cutting the end portion off of the ham. She then placed it in a pan and put all of the spices on it along with nice glaze and then she put in the oven.

A friend was there in the kitchen watching, asked, why do you cut the end off of the ham before you bake it? The woman said it's what my mum always did when she baked a ham. Well, as it turns out, mum cut the end off of the ham because those big whole hams she baked at Christmas just wouldn't fit into the pan she had.

Some traditions don't serve any purpose at all. More often than not though they do serve a purpose. In the end, the traditions we practice will have a positive or a negative effect, depending on what we believe and teach about the traditions.

As you know, the Lutheran Church – even here in the AELC follow a number of traditions. For instance, the Lutheran Church throughout the World is, by and large, a liturgical church, which means, we follow a certain form of worship. The Divine Services in our hymnals are the tradition we follow. Those services have been handed down from generation to generation. Many of the elements of the services we follow go back thousands of years.

We are very traditional too in that we follow a church calendar, emphasizing throughout the year various seasons, such as Advent, and Christmas, Lent, and Easter, Pentecost and other various festivals and traditions. And, of course, in each one of those seasons we practice certain traditions associated with the season.

We are a traditional church because we believe the traditions we follow are good and helpful. We believe they are beneficial because of their emphasis on the Law and the Gospel and because they support in each of us a solid and broad foundation of faith. Consequently, many of us, myself included, saddened by the less traditional forms of worship and the less traditional practices that have been adopted in the last 20 years or so by many Lutheran congregations around the world.

Our Lutheran forefather's, who faithfully handed down to us the traditions of our church, were rather intelligent men. They foresaw the possibility of division arising in the church over tradition. Consequently, they gave us some instruction on how we are to treat tradition, including our much beloved worship forms. They wrote, "with regard to (traditions) that have been established by men, it is taught among us that those (traditions) are to be observed which may be observed without sin and which contribute to peace and good order in the church, among them being certain holy days, festivals, and the like. Yet we accompany these observances with instruction so that consciences may not be burdened by the notion that such things are necessary for salvation. Moreover it is taught that all ordinances and traditions instituted by men for the purpose of propitiating God and earning grace are contrary to the Gospel and the teaching about faith in Christ."

So, traditions can be followed without harm. In fact, they can be quiet beneficial to our faith. However, they can also become terribly divisive and destructive and even detrimental to our faith when we consider them necessary for salvation. That was the case with the traditions followed by the Scribes and Pharisees. Their traditions were loathsome in the eyes of God mainly for two reasons. First, they saw their traditions as an outward sign of their righteousness, but all the while their hearts were far from God. And second, they tended to put their traditions over the commands of God.

Jesus said, **‘This people honours Me with its lips, but its hearts are far from me. They worship Me in vain, since what they teach as doctrines are the commandments of men.’ You have abandoned the Commandment of God, but you hold on to the tradition of men.”**

Tradition can never compensate for our essential need for God’s forgiveness and grace in Christ. It can’t, in and of itself, quite the conscience that cries out for absolution. It can’t, in and of itself, mend the broken heart, or, soothe the troubled soul.

Tradition is best used when it serves the Gospel. For instance, the sign of the cross is made by some, not because it demonstrates Christian piety, or, because it invokes a magical blessing on the one who makes, it. Rather, it is made because it brings to memory Christ and Holy Baptism, for it was in Holy Baptism that the sign of the cross was made upon the sinner’s heart and mind to mark him as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.

Likewise, we follow a certain worship form on Sunday morning, not because it make us acceptable to God, or, because it's necessary for our salvation. We follow it because it serve us the gifts and the blessings of God in word and song. We follow it because they are a recitation of God’s Word and, **“faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.”** [Romans 10:17.]

Ultimately the traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees lead them away from an honest view of themselves and from a faithful use of God’s Word. They ignored the wickedness of their own hearts because they preferred to focus on how their traditions made them look on the outside. In another passage in Scripture, Jesus condemned them again. **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.”** [Matthew 23.]

If you’ve been cutting off the end of the ham to prepare it for Christmas dinner, you can probably stop doing that. It really doesn’t serve any purpose. On the other hand, to the degree that faith traditions point you to Christ and Him crucified for your sins and for the sins of the world, that’s a good thing.

Church tradition for the Christian, is a vivid reminder of the permanence that is ours in Christ, **“who is the same yesterday, today and forever,”** [Hebrews 13:8.] and who, in death and resurrection, **“was reconciling the world unto Himself, not counting men’s trespasses against them.”** [2Corinthians 5:19.] This, my friends, is permanence. “Today, in the stead and by the command of Christ, I forgive you all of your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.”**

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. **Amen.**

**3rd HYMN: 149,**

P Lamenting our sin, let us turn in faith to the Blessed Trinity, for He is merciful and full of compassion.  
*Brief Silence.*

P For true faith, that all Christians be defended from false teaching and error, and from confusing the wisdom of the world with the commandments of God,.... Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For wisdom and a right knowledge of God, that His people not be led astray by empty words and false teaching; For faithful and confident Christian witness to the world in word and deed, that others be drawn to hear the words of spirit and life and not our own traditions,.... Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For children, that they be brought up to fear and love the Lord, and to honour their fathers, mothers, and all in authority. For parents, that they be given the wisdom and patience to raise God-fearing children, ....Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For husbands and wives, that in their vocations they take the time to love each other and submit to one another, neither indulging in selfish whims, nor neglecting the needs of the other,.... Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For the leaders of our nation, that in their actions, they work for the good of all people, even those not yet born,.... Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For future pastors, and church workers, that when they speak the truth in love, those who hear them not turn back or reject the Word of God, but rather hear it in repentance and believe,.... Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For a right use of the Sacrament, that those who approach the altar this day do so worthily, in confident belief that it's not just an old tradition but truly is Jesus' body and blood are given to them for the forgiveness of their sins and for their salvation,.... Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For the sick, for the dying, for all who are suffering [*including* ], that God grant them healing, comfort and patience to endure their afflictions,.... Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For those who mourn, that in remembrance of their baptism, they rejoice in the promise of resurrection, being raised again in union with Jesus Christ and all His faithful, ....Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For these and whatever else You know we need, hear us, dear Father, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C Amen.**

**4th Hymn: 300.**