

Sermon 29 August 2021 (Lockdown)

Mark 7:1-8

This passage really does highlight the difference between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees. It highlights an accusation frequently levelled at the Pharisees by Jesus – that they are too preoccupied with their rules and regulations to the exclusion of what is really important, the expressing of God's love to all and sundry.

In this case, the Pharisees are criticising some of the disciples for not following the prescribed ritual of hand-washing before eating food. This ritual was very particular and was not really in the interests of hygienic purity, but rather was ceremonial. Before every meal and between every course the hands had to be washed in a certain way.

Anyone failing to adhere to these regulations was considered to be unclean in the sight of God. But Jesus saw it quite differently. In his eyes, by focusing on these rules and regulations, the Pharisees lost sight of what the law of God was really all about – to love God and love one another.

What also made him angry was that in the implementation of these laws, the Pharisees made themselves the focal point of religion instead of God and his message.

Jesus called the Pharisees 'hypocrites.' The Greek word *hypokrites*, from which 'hypocrite' comes, has an interesting background. It originally meant *someone who answers*, but progressed to mean *someone who answers in a set dialogue*, in other words, an actor. And so finally, it came to mean someone whose life is something of an act, that is, they say one thing but do something quite different.

So what is the message for us here? Quite simply, that we can attend church, read the Bible etc but if our lives don't reflect what God wants us to be, then it is rather meaningless. Let me tell you a story. It is a parable.

Two cars were waiting at a red light. The light turned green, but the man in the front car didn't notice it. A woman in the car behind him begins pounding on the steering wheel and yelling at the man to move. The man doesn't move. The woman is going ballistic, ranting and raving at the man, pounding the dashboard with her fists.

The light turns orange and the woman begins to blow the car horn and screams profanities and curses at the man. The man looks up, sees the orange light and accelerates through the intersection just as the light turns red. The woman is beside herself, screaming in frustration as she misses her chance to get through the intersection.

As she is still in mid-rant, there is a tap on the window and she looks up to see a cop standing there. The cop tells her to get out of the car and keep her hands out in front of her. She complies, speechless at what is happening. The cop snaps handcuffs on her and hustles

her into the patrol car. She is too bewildered to ask any questions and is driven to the station where she is fingerprinted, photographed and placed in a cell.

After a couple of hours, she is fetched from the cell and taken to the booking desk where the original cop is waiting. He hands her the bag containing her things and says, 'I'm sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn and abusing the driver in front of you. Then I noticed your bumper sticker which read, "Jesus loves you," the sticker on your back windscreen which read, "Follow me to Sunday School," and also the Christian fish emblem on the trunk of your car. So naturally, I thought the car couldn't belong to you and that you must have stolen it!'

We are all human, every one of us, but we do need to ensure that, as much as possible, the way we conduct ourselves reflects what we stand for and what we believe in. It's what we do, not what we say, that determines whether we are good Christians or not.

I leave the last word to James, who writes, *'If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are just fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.'* James 1:26. In other words, as he so often says, we must walk the talk.