

## **Between the Altar and the Door**

Let us Pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be to your glory, oh God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

It took me a long time to write this sermon today. I read the lessons and the Gospel over and over. I prayed: All I heard was, "How is your heart?" If you listened carefully every lesson and psalm, in one way or another, told us how to live and keep our hearts true to God.

Today we have left the Gospel of John and returned to the Gospel of Mark. Jesus is in one of the towns by the Sea of Galilee. James, the writer of Mark, makes a point of telling us that the Pharisees and their scribes were from Jerusalem. Jerusalem is quite a distance from the Sea of Galilee. In the past these are the same Pharisees who have criticized Jesus for working on the Sabbath, eating with tax collectors, and touching the unclean.

The Pharisees were not all bad. They were charged with keeping the Israelite's safe. They kept the people from straying and worshiping false gods. They did this often by making up their own rules and traditions. As time went on people and the Pharisees believed they were really God's laws.

In Deuteronomy, we are reminded of what the true laws of God are, the Ten Commandments. Moses began teaching them to the Israelite's and interpreting them for them. He emphasized that they must neither add to nor subtract from what he was telling them, but keep the commandments. By obeying these commandments you will be considered a wise and a discerning people. He told them that they must remember to always tell their children and their children's children so that they never forget.

Later in Deuteronomy 6: 4-9

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.<sup>a</sup> 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

This is the Great Commandment. Moses called all of Israel together and told them this. It is called The Shema. Shema means hear. It is a prayer to be said twice a day so that they remember to keep the laws of God.

The Pharisees of Jesus time were about 5% of the Judean population. They were the elite. They had water, time and money to obey the tradition and rules that they had made up for their own betterment. The rest of the poor Judeans who were struggling under them they considered the unclean. This is why Jesus called them Hypocrites.

Mark7: 6-8

He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

'This people honors me with their lips,

but their hearts are far from me;

7 in vain do they worship me,

teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

Jesus then told the crowd that there is nothing outside a person that by going in that can defile, but the things that that come out are what defile. While he was alone with the disciples he explained to them further those things that defile a person.

The evils of the human heart. Fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, envy, pride, slander, and folly.

How to keep your heart in the right place is also in the Psalm.

Our Psalm 15 asks, Lord who can abide in your tent and on your holy hill?

2 Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,

and speak the truth from their heart;

3 who do not slander with their tongue,

and do no evil to their friends,

nor take up a reproach against their neighbors;

4 in whose eyes the wicked are despised,

but who honor those who fear the LORD;

who stand by their oath even to their hurt;

5 who do not lend money at interest,

and do not take a bribe against the innocent.

Those who treat others well, walk blamelessly, do not speak evil or sin with finances, they are the people who may enter the temple. Jesus was explaining that the Pharisees had forgotten God's laws and were using their own traditions and rules to keep the Judeans under their control.

I came to this church 28 years ago, actually I was Baptized here by Pastor Almleaf, 64 years ago, It was obvious that this was a traditional Lutheran church when I returned as an adult. The word heart and soul are interchanged in the Bible. The core of the person and who they are emanates from the heart. It can be hidden , but not for long. Its true essence is soon revealed. They say you can see the soul through the eyes of a person. I can tell you that there were a lot of Pharisees in this church who made traditions law. As I became more involved I did hear often, we don't do it that way. That is not Lutheran. Tradition!!!

I spoke to God: "Help me with this sermon, and this is what I heard "- "How is your heart?"

I answered God- How is my Heart? I am trying!!! I am Human! Why are you asking me? You know how my my heart is every minute of the day. I can't hide anything from you.

I try not to take this Magnifying Glass and look at others. To look for all the faults. In the same breath, my heart is so sad. I look at peoples actions and see selfishness, greed , slander, etc,. So I ask the Lord that their hearts may change. That my heart can change because I am not innocent. I also look for good things in people and concentrate on those .

I take this mirror and I look at myself, I see my faults. I try not to forget as I go about my day. I will meet others and I cannot forget that I am not above anyone that I meet. I can use this mirror to see how others see my actions, what affect my words may have.

My last tool is the Bible. To study with others, come to church and hear the word, read on my own, but to refresh my soul with the living word. It reminds us not to rely on our own works, but to remember that I have God's grace.

I rely every day on the new commandment Jesus gave.

John 13: 34-35

**34** I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. **35** By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

We as the church often forget why we are truly here. To Baptize, speak the word, and Commune together. Notice I said the Church not Trinity alone. To take these outside the walls and forget tradition, remember the love that Jesus showed us.

As I was reading James, I was reminded of song. It was by Casting Crowns, *Between the Altar and the Door*. We come to church and we hear the word of God. Songs are sung, communion may be taken, prayers are said, forgiveness is given, and blessings are made. We take all of this into our hearts. What happens after we walk out the door? Do we respond with action? Are we doers or hearers. What happens to us between the Altar and the door?

It is too easy to walk out the door and become a hearer and not a doer. The tools of the magnifying glass, mirror, and bible may be good reminders to be doers. If you call yourself a child of God then remember you are a representative and are under that magnifying glass. No one expects you to use one on them.

Use the mirror you look in every day, look at your heart. How is your Heart?

Anchor yourself with the Bible, remind yourself that you can do nothing without the help of God.

GO out that door today remembering that with your baptism the Holy Spirit wrote the commandments on your heart and Jesus died one death for all of our sins. We have His Grace. Be Doers! Amen