

A Heart of Worship
Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23
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Often it can become so easy to keep traditions. Traditions sometimes can become routine, rote, regular. What I mean by this is that we do them without hesitation, revocation or even equivocation. It is what we do. In my experience I have seen things in church and in life that are just for the sake of tradition or the sake of keeping a custom. Sometime even traditions or customs that really don't serve our present

I will qualify this by saying I'm not knocking tradition or custom and I have a great love and depth for tradition. Yet, also learning to make room for new ideas and realities. I understand why we do some things that we do. Many of us have a grasp on the traditional things that we do in our congregations and in our culture at times. We have a format, a formula, a order of service, gather, word, meal, sent, a rubric if you will. We have a system, a liturgy, a modality. I have heard it said that what many people like about the liturgical church is that if you go to a church in California, it will mirror the same order of a congregation in Tennessee. The variable might be the people, but I can know what to expect in a traditional setting.

I have a friend who loves traditional church and when the church began to start singing from the screen rather than the green book, or cranberry book, this change created all kinds of feels for them. I can remember sharing that it really is the same and the screen offers you freedom to not have to look down at the book, but you can focus your attention up. You can be hands free. You don't have to turn a page or make sure you are on the right line and singing the right verse. The screen aids you to be able to just flow. There rebuttal was "flow," but how will I know where the notes changes and I can't see the melody line, I cannot hold the book and feel the pages. I cannot see the words lift from the page into my mind as I sing. As time went on, I saw my friend become a little more comfortable with the screen and one day I saw them with their hands raised and eyes closed singing there heart out. I'm not knocking tradition, I'm just asking the question that the text raises for us this morning, "what is tradition, if our hearts are not in it?"

We can do a lot of things and we can serve the best of them, but if our intention are contrary, are we really serving?

I have great passion for worship. Nothing excites me more than being in worship and sharing in the meal with the saints and loving on people. Nothing energizes me more than corporate worship together. I find God at church in the pews, amongst the priesthood of believers. In the singing, in the word being preached, in peace shared, at the table together. I love church. I am a church guy. This is what I do. I can do church in my sleep. I wonder happens when what I do does not align with what I am? I wonder what happens when what I do does not lend itself to who I am. When, what I do is not coupled with what God wants from Me. When what I do is not centered in my heart, but centered in my doing?

So often we do things just because we do them with no regard to why, how or the outcome. We get in a routine, we get in a rhythm, a custom and before long we think that it is the only way to do that. If someone else does differently, we question them, give them side eye and even point fingers and scold them for not keeping with the way it has been done. We even sometimes say things like this is the way it has always been done. I do it, my mama did it and her mama did it and that's that. Well, I must tell you millennials and this generation don't care about the way it used to be, they are going to create their own way. That does not mean the tradition is not important or significant to them, it just means it can be different.

I have come to learn in my experiences tradition with no heart is mundane. Tradition with soul lacks the energy and presence to be transformative and invigorating. Customs without history are just repeated exercise to appease rather than lifegiving to be carried proudly. I rather the church kids show up with heart than to show up because they were forced too. If my kid comes to church and is excited to be there, I don't care what they wear. If our young people want to light the candles and not wearing an acolyte robe gets more kids to sign up, robes gone. Is it really about the robe or is a teachable moment about service rendered unto the Lord? I want their heart in it, rather than their routine. I want their soul it rather than a check off for community service hours.

The text raises questions for us to consider not just the reality of tradition, but rather human condition. There is this underpin or tone if you will that suggest evil that lies in crux of our heart. The prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it?" It goes on to say that the Lord searches the heart.

There is a suggestion here that we honor God with our lips, but our hearts are far from God.

I wonder how many worship without connection, worship without devotion, worship without a deeper sense of more than just another service. This is my lifeline to a better me, worship is my place of refueling my life, being in the presence of God is where I find peace from the storm and serenity from the chaos. It is where I meet with God and commune with the holy of holies. It is beyond just what I do, it is who I am.

There is a suggestion that we just do this in practice, but not in our hearts.

If we tell the truth and are real about it, there is times when our hearts are not in it. There are times when we are not feeling it. But the text calls us to not just consider our feelings it calls us to examine our motives. Our condition, our faculties, our capacity to not just be passive spectators, but active participants in what God is doing not just in church, but also in the world and in our lives.

Please don't miss this query for us to recognize that this text is calling us to a greater reality of who we are. This text is beyond mere tradition and high church versus low church, hybrid church versus virtual church, in-person church versus trying to figure it out church. This text is calling

us to check our heart. It is calling us to check our motives, to clear our conscious. To take a deeper dive at what is within, rather what's on the outside.

I know a whole lot of folks that look the part, but aint the part. I know a whole bunch of people who can act the part, but can't live the part. They can read the part, but fail to apply the part. I've been around for a while to know the saying is true, "you cannot judge a book by its cover." Some folks got this thing down on Sunday mornings, but there Monday through Saturday does not match the faith they profess on Sunday. How you can be Holy on Sunday and Honory on Monday...Praise the Lord on Sunday and Raise Hell(Hades) on Saturday. It does not work that way.

Here is my encouragement for you this week.

1.) Check your Relationship

-With all that is going in this world and in this new 5th wave of Covid-19 and the pressures of trying to live through all we have gone through these last 19 plus months now, It is enough to make one critical, cynical, and everything other than desiring faith.

-I have some many friend who were strong in their faith, now have questions about faith.

-The truth is sometimes what believe does not match what I see.

-but can I take a moment of personal privilege and share, when I think about all that I have endured and come through in my life over the last year. God has taken me from the pit to the palace. I almost died last year, but I'm still here to tell the story. It aint what it look like for me, it is what I believe like. I believe God whether I can see him or not, on my best day, I trust God, on my worst days I trust God. I have been down and out and God has raised me up. Not because I have a stronger faith then anybody else, but because of relationship....

2.) Check your Heart

-In January I had my visit to my cardiologist to check up on my heart. He made me do this test on a treadmill where I had to walk, then he added some resistance to it and still wanted me to walk, then he added like a short jog and then a hill and then a mountain and then...(im just kidding.) but as he added resistance, what was easy became hard. What was simple became complicated, it became convoluted, it created stress. Life has a way of adding resistance. This experience, this situation, this difficulty, this challenge, this issue. What was easy become hard and sometimes our hearts can't handle what we go through and it too can become hard...Hardened to fracture relationships, hardened though misguided ideals, hardened through even sometimes the lens of routine, hardedned through mishap and misfortune and pain and trauma. We have to check our hearts, the seat of emotion, the place that shapes our motives. When we don't we are subject to clogged arteries, clogged thinking, clogged societal norms and clogged junk. It only through careful reflection, examination that one can pray like the psalmist David and say, "Create in a me a clean heart oh God and renew a right Spirit."

3.) Check Your Worship

-You worship what you give most of your energy and your time too.

-I know for many we have been in this online church thing, and it is not the same.

-I know many don't even watch church on Sundays and if you serve a young adult population, we know they watch it like every other day besides Sunday and most watch it on their cell phone in between doing something else. At best they only watch like a few minutes of it. Facts....

-Here is encouragement. Jesus says in Matthew there will come a time when true worshippers will worship me in spirit and in truth. It does not matter if we are in the building or not, online or offline, our worship is never confined to a space, technology, a device, or a book. Our worship is a matter of wherever we are spending quality time with God. Where there are two or three gathered in my Name, I'm in the midst... So if you in your dorm room, I'm there, if you are in the courtroom, I'm there, in the sick room I'm there, in the lion den, I'm there, in the jaws of a whale, I'm there. Worship is not about where, it is about devotion to Christ and a desire to be in the presence of God. I can worship in my shower, driving in my car, on my adventure walks. Give me some gospel, my earpods and I can worship. I don't need Sunday Morning or Wednesday night. Worship breaks out for me at the grocery store. Just the other day I sat back and begin to consider how far I have come in the last eleven months and tear rolled down my face and I began to thank God. It was nobody but Christ. Worship happens when you least expect. I want us to rethink about why we go to church. It is not to go to worship, because of you me, by the time you go to church you should have already had church.....

Let me close our time together. Mark's gospel gives us this propensity toward our own hearts reality and I don't want to move away from that, but I want us to refocus those things that come out of us toward a way that says, yeah we get it wrong and yeah sometimes I don't always do the right thing, yeah, my attitude can at times be horrible and I might be mean, but I am a work in progress. I want you to recognize your depravity, but on the flip side I want you to recognize God's grace. I want you to recognize we all got work to do, none of us are perfect, yet on the flip side I want you to know God's love. Beyond all of the broken parts of us, the fractures and the bruises we are still made in God's image. With flaws and all, God loves us, heals us and call us together.

I'm coming back to a heart of worship, where it is all about you, all about you, Jesus! Amen!