

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
13th Sunday after Pentecost
26 August 2012
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita
Mark 7:1-13

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

What, do you suppose, it'd be like to eat with God?

For some of you, it would be stressful.

Am I holding my silverware the right way?

Is my napkin situated properly?

Am I eating too quickly?

Was that bite too big?

Is there anything on my chin, caught in my mustache—how's my hair?

For others, it practically wouldn't make a world of difference.

You'd still slurp just as loud and obnoxiously as if you were alone.

You'd knock His drink over reaching across the table for whatever it is you want more of.

You'd cut him off mid-sentence to tell another story about yourself.

And after a good belch, you'd pick the remains out from between your teeth.

And for the rest of you, there'd probably be a mix of pious fear, awe, uncertainty,
and wondering what still needs to get done with you get home.

In all of this, notice that all the talk has been so far about us—
about what we do, how we'd react, and what we would say.

This is the way of the Pharisees.

Sure, most Pharisees probably fell into the first group: those caring about getting it all just right.

But the reality is, the Pharisees are not defined by getting it right, but by focusing on themselves. Even at a meal with Jesus, with God in the flesh, they're most concerned about their hands—
and worse yet, concerned about somebody else's hands!

They'd have done well to focus on Jesus' hands.

That's where the blessing comes from—

that's where the nails would pierce and the blood would flow.

But no, the Pharisees care very little about Jesus, what He does, what He says, what He is like. They care about themselves, and they judge everyone else accordingly.

And that's where we fall too.

We judge others based off ourselves.

We look at the outsides—the actions, the deeds, the words—and compare them to our outsides.

We come to the altar rail and wonder: “What right does she have to be here?”

We rank and categorize various sins so that those more noticeable than others must also be more damnable.

We rail against the homosexual and the adulteress,
 but go home to a hidden life of porn and deceit.
 We condemn the out of wedlock pregnancy and the drug dealer,
 but then justify our hatred as we discuss these hideous sins over coffee with a friend.

What right does he have at this altar?
 What right do the disciples have to eat with common, unclean hands?
 What right do I have to kneel before God Himself and receive His bread of eternal life?
 None.

We have no right at all.
 Clean or unclean, washed or unwashed, alcoholic, divorced, drug-addicted, or scholar-athlete.
 We have no right to eat with God.
 No right to sit at His table.
 No right to share our self-centered stories,
 or worry about whether I'll get home in time for the game.

Where Pharisees always go wrong—both then and now—is by letting the focus be on me.
 Pharisees always have a way of having a right to be there.
 Whether it's because they've washed just the right way, or because they're not gay.
 Pharisees think they have a right to sit at the table.

And to establish this right, they pass on a long list of ways to make sure you're alright.
 These lists are normally based on good things, to be sure,
 but they're all wrong-headed right from the get-go.

These lists, *human traditions*, as our text calls them, are the criteria for justifying your right to the table.

Keep these, more or less, they say, and you know you're in the clear.
 And the more you work at keeping this list, these *human traditions*, the more you demand it of others.

If you've worked this hard to keep the list, they ought to as well.
 And the more you know the list the more you recognize transgressors of the list.
 And the more you recognize those who don't keep the list, the angrier you get—it's unfair:
 What right do they have at this table?

That's the way of the Pharisees.

And the solution isn't to swap out their list with another.
 Their list is actually quite good—they're baptizing not only their hands and pots, but also their couches and recliners!

No, it's not a new list they need—it's the destruction of the list!
 They need to quit being Pharisees!

Quit looking at yourself, and your list, and then your neighbor.

Look to Christ.

That's the difference in today's Gospel between the Pharisees and the disciples.
The Pharisees knew right off the bat the disciples weren't washed, they were common, filthy,
and unbecoming of those at such a meal.

And yet the disciples hadn't even realized they were unwashed.
All they knew is that they were at meal with Jesus.

And so it is for us.
That any of us share a meal with Jesus is pure Gospel—pure *grace alone*.

None of us has any right to be here.
No one deserves the body and blood of Christ.
No one earns it.
None is clean, none is holy, none has a right to it.

And yet here He is—and you're here too.

So quit being a Pharisee.
Quit looking at yourself and your list and all the ways your neighbor doesn't stack up.
Don't follow *human tradition*, which is simply an attempt to use the Law for your own purpose.
Don't tell Jesus who's got a right and who doesn't.

This isn't about washing.
It isn't about ritual.
It isn't about tradition.

It's about the heart.
It's about Jesus removing that stony, self-centered, Pharisaic heart of yours,
and then creating within you a clean heart, a new heart, a heart fixed on Him alone.

Come and eat with Jesus.
Have a meal with God.
And don't worry about whether you picked your teeth,
or babbled on about yourself,
or forgot to defrost the ground beef.

Let your eyes be fixed on Jesus.
And when that's the case, you and your neighbor are free.
Free to love and serve and rejoice with one another that even though we have no right,
our Lord has invited us to His place for a meal.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit