

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

Today our Lord declares all food clean (Mk 7:19).

That was a problem for the Pharisees.

Like last week's hand-washing, the Pharisees have a few tell-tale signs they use to judge others.

If you keep to the diet proscribed, you'll be clean and holy.

However, if you don't keep their diet, if you don't abstain from the foods marked "unclean," then you're defiled, unclean, common, and under judgment.

For the Pharisee, it's what goes in the mouth that makes someone unclean.

And so when Jesus declares all food clean, He at the same time declares all mankind unclean.

You see the Pharisees had a horribly weak view of sin.

Don't get me wrong, they looked for it all the time—

trying to find it in others so they continued to look good.

But their understanding of sin is quite weak.

And there are many times we fall into the same trap.

As Jesus said,

"There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." (15)

So what comes out of us?

Jesus says,

"For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." (21-23)

And notice where these come from: *the heart*.

The Pharisees have tried to find sin in the things of this world.

They should've looked at the heart.

But the heart is a difficult thing to control. And the Pharisees are all about control.

Remember, they've got their list out and they're watching to see your progress:

right stuff in, right stuff out, they say.

They must keep tabs on everything that comes in, whether through the eye, the mouth, or the ear.

And if any red flags go up, you're out.

And why do they do it?

Because that's the sort of sin they can control.
 It's the sort of sin they can manage, they can beat it, overcome it, get rid of it.
 That's the sort of sin they can *clean themselves from*.

But your sin isn't so simple as that.
 It's not just a surface level tarnish that can be scrubbed clean and appropriately checked.
 Your sin is infused straight into the bone.
 It's a part of who you are.
 It's what has infected your *heart*.

And that's why these evil things come out of your mouth—they flow from the heart.

So as a Pharisee, if sin is something external to us—
 something outside of us that can be checked and balanced, and weighed and measured—
 then it can also be controlled.

But if sin is what comes from within us, from the heart, from who we are,
 then it cannot be controlled or tamed or hidden.

The only solution to the heart problem, the sin that has so deeply infected us, so terminally
 marked us, is for there to be a new heart.

And this new heart doesn't mean what we call *a change of heart*.
 It doesn't mean *getting your life back together*.
 Nothing from within you is able to fix the damage done—
 you can't change your heart, or clean it from its guilt.

If the problem of sin is not what comes into the body from the outside,
 but what flows from within, from the heart,
 then the solution cannot be from within.

It must come from Christ.
 It must come from the outside—*extra nos*, as Luther loved to say!

The Gospel is always *extra nos*, outside of us.
 It's always a Word spoken not from within, but from without—preached from the mouth of
 another.

This is how you know salvation is always by Grace, because it's always given as a gift from the
 outside.

And that's our Lord today in the Gospel reading,
 coming to us from the outside, breaking into our world of sin,
 entering our world of evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, and adultery.
 He steps down and comes among us even in our coveting, our wickedness, and our deceit.

This Jesus comes to us from the outside, from another world, from a place where it is not evil that flows from the heart, but love.

And because love flows from the heart of God, what comes out of God is Christ for you.

This is our certainty.

This is our trust.

We cling to this Jesus, the God who comes to us from outside of us.

We hold to His word of promise.

Because that alone is sure and true and clean.

And it's His Word that makes us clean.

His Word that speaks us holy.

His Word that gives life to our dying bodies, and restores our soul.

We do not trust what comes out of us—

our works, our words, or our thoughts.

For anything coming from us is uncertain at best, evil at worst.

But if it comes from God, from outside of us, *extra nos*, then we can be sure.

And here that external Word comes to you today.

Here Christ speaks you holy.

Here Christ feeds you with His Word of life, His forgiveness of sins.

Here the work of the cross is given to you and you are free—

no longer a Pharisee, judging your cleanness or purity based on what goes in.

It is in this gathering, this Church, that our Lord creates within each of you a clean heart.

And it's only from this forgiving work of His that good things flow from our heart.

But when they do, let us praise the Lord.

For these are signs of His forgiveness, His work, His love flowing through us.

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