

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

4:1 So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.

4:2 You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the LORD your God with which I am charging you.

4:6 You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!"

4:7 For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him?

4:8 And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?

4:9 But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children--

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

7:1 Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him,

7:2 they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them.

7:3 (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders;

7:4 and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.)

7:5 So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

7:6 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;

7:7 in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

7:8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

7:14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand:

7:15 there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

7:21 For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder,

7:22 adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly.

7:23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Proclamation of the Word

There is a scene from the classic *Fiddler on the Roof*ⁱ when the Papa is the main speaker...

Choir Sings: Tradition, tradition!...

"Here in Anatevka we have traditions about everything: how to sleep, how to eat, how to work, how to wear our clothes, for instance. We always keep our heads covered and always wear a prayer shawl. This shirt our constant devotion to God.

You may ask, "How did this tradition start?"

"I will tell you. I don't know, but it's a tradition. And because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do."

Choir Sings: Tradition, tradition!...

Traditions. We all have them. We have traditions we love and some we do not. When the world seems chaotic or frenzied, it is traditions that give us a sense of order and peace sometimes.

I crowdsourced on Facebook and some of you responded. Most traditions fell into two categories: Holiday traditions, especially Thanksgiving, and prayer/devotional times with family. And there was the one, of course, Saturday football games in Clemson!

Sometimes we have no clue, like the Papa in *Fiddler on the Roof*, why they exist, but we do them anyway.

You heard the story about the woman who always cut off the ends of the turkey before she put it in the pan to cook it. When her husband asked why she did it as he considered the ends the best part, she replied, "because my mother did it that way." When she asked her mother why, they referred to the grandmother. The grandmother replied, "My pan was always too small so I cut off part of the turkey."

Two generations repeated this tradition without knowing why.

Today Jesus is challenging tradition, but not just for the sake of change. Jesus and his disciples have obviously offended the Pharisees who ask why they do not follow the ritual of hand-washing. When asked why they do not follow the tradition of the elders, and eat with defiled hands?

Jesus cuts to the heart of the matter.

"Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition." (Mark 7:6-8)

At first glance this is a debate over hand-washing- a debate parents and children have regularly sometimes. Did you wash your hands before dinner? Hygiene is our focus not devotion to God. For the Jews at this time it was about holiness, about being good. When you read unclean or defiled, that means a bad practice. Rituals were to help the faithful be holy, set-apart, different from the people who followed other gods. And being clean was about good behavior. Faith is about believing, behaving, and belonging. For a good Jew, first you belong. Then you are good by your behavior. Not that belief doesn't matter, but the others are foremost.

There are verses omitted and here is where Jesus goes deeper. He calls them to fulfill the Law. He pushes them and basically says,

Let's talk about tradition...if you want to talk about tradition. Why do you find a tax loophole and make an offering to God so that you don't have to take care of your mother and your father in the old age. When you received the 10 Commandments what part of Honor your father and your mother, did you not understand? You are paying attention to the small stuff and missing the point. In other words going through the motions is not what I desire, true worship of God leads to ethical behavior and right relationships with others.

Then Jesus pushes a little further...and says your behavior is the outcome of your intention. He contradicts popular computer speak- "Garbage in. Garbage out." Or when we talk about food, "You are what you eat."

Jesus says what matters is your heart. What is in your heart will be reflected in your behavior. In other words if you want to know what is in a person's heart, watch their actions. If someone is angry at another in their heart, chances are they will lash out directly or be more passive aggressive. Either way, the anger in their heart will come out. Until that is dealt with, nothing will change.

So Jesus challenges us to self-examination of our own hearts for sure. So words and deeds tell others who we are really. It's not what goes in. It is what comes out- words and behavior.

Example: In an old Ask Billy Graham column a woman wrote that sometimes her Music Director introduced new hymns that she didn't care for. She asked Billy Graham if she should complain to her pastor. To which the Rev. Graham wrote in effect. *We have a singing faith and are called to praise God with our lips. Instead of complaining to anyone, ask God to help her be grateful for all music that points us to God, new and old. Maybe a hymn you don't like can be used by God to encourage another and to draw him or her closer to Christ. And to remember that even the old beloved hymns were new once.*

It's about the intention of our hearts that leads to our words and actions. He was helping her see the bigger purpose of music- to help us worship and praise God.

Another Example: Donald Trump says he is a Presbyterian. Look at his words and actions to test that. In fact the church he says he attends is actually RCA (Reformed Church in America), not Presbyterian, and they say he is not an active member.ⁱⁱ His words do not match the observed behavior.

The first clue was his comments about forgiveness and sin. He says he doesn't need to confess sins and ask forgiveness in a CNN interview, that he tries not to do anything that he would have to confess.ⁱⁱⁱ But we believe that we are sinners in need of God's grace and help. Any good works are enabled by the Holy Spirit. We confess our sins regularly as we do in worship. Each week at my home church as part of confession, the choir would always sing from Psalm 51, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." What is in your heart is the important thing.

Before I/we get stuck judging another, though, we must examine our own hearts. Remember Jesus was on a mission. Jesus had a big picture vision and mission. This is more than personal self-help spirituality, Jesus' challenge to them and to Fort Hill church is this. Do our traditions help us accomplish our mission??^{iv}

Our Mission: Glorify God, grow disciples, meet human needs

We are remaking spaces as we Bridge Generations, but we are doing this to help us accomplish our mission and by 2020 we should have a new multi-purpose facility. Our building renovation and remodel is not just a nice way to update our clubhouse, we are preparing the way for our mission. Jesus commissions us to go, make disciples. As Clemson University grows by 30% by the year 2020, our church needs to be ready to welcome all those who will come here to work and learn. And then prepare ourselves to be sent out into the world in need of the good news of Jesus Christ. By the way, we are still glad to take your pledge of financial support to accomplish our work. Pledge cards are still in the register pads!

Our Christian Education ministry has taken that call to grow disciples very seriously and is challenging all of us to grow. And in order to strengthen our commitment to learning together in fellowship, we are being asked to make changes. The Bridge is a renewed commitment to growing disciples by gathering with children and youth to sing, move, play, and learn God's word together in our age groups. Youth will assist with the younger kids building relationships and developing our youth as servant leaders. Adults will meet together to grow as disciples, too. Our mission is to equip the saints for the work of ministry and to build up the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:10).

We need your prayers and participation. All of us can pray for those leaders who are committed to serving and those who will grow in faith. And we need you to make a commitment with your presence. In this way we fulfill the scripture from James 1:22

“But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.”

In order to set the Bridge hour up for success, we are changing our Sunday morning schedule beginning next week.

Now, let's be honest, change is hard. Our first reaction to change is always, “Why? Surely we don't need to do that.” If I asked for a show of hands today, most of us would say, just keep it like it is.

You've heard the old joke: "How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb? CHANGE! My grandfather donated that light bulb!"

One of my Facebook friends acknowledged that with change comes loss. She first said she has grieved the loss of traditions when life has changed or a loved one has died. Then she said, but changes can be exciting and energizing leading us to new meaningful traditions.

We are being asked to make changes because our habits, our traditions were not helping us accomplish our mission. And what matters is not our comfort with change or traditions, but are we set up to glorify God, grow disciples, and meet human needs to the best of our ability?

Jesus says, what matters is what is in your heart. Being a hypocrite in the passage means your outer actions do not match your heart. If you profess to love God, then you will be doers of the word, practicing what you believe in faithful commitment together with the community of faith.

So I challenge you to show up next Sunday open to what the Holy Spirit is doing with us. I pray that God might encourage our hearts and draw us all and even those who are not here yet, to draw closer to Christ. Then we go back into the world as Christ followers to share God's love with our community and the world.

I think the Papa in *Fiddler on the Roof* is right when he says, “And because of our traditions everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do.” I pray our traditions help us know God and what God desires for us to do.

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ⁱ Joseph Stein, *Fiddler on the Roof* Musical, 1964. Music by Jerry Brock, Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick.

ⁱⁱ see <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/28/politics/donald-trump-church-member/>

ⁱⁱⁱ See <http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/18/politics/trump-has-never-sought-forgiveness/>

^{iv} David Lose, Tradition, August 24, 2015 ...in the Meantime site at www.inthemenatime.com