

Mark 7 The Pharisees and some of the experts in the law came from Jerusalem and gathered around Jesus. ²They saw some of his disciples eating bread with unclean (that is, unwashed) hands. ³In fact, the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they scrub their hands with a fist, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions they adhere to, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, kettles, and dining couches. ⁵The Pharisees and the experts in the law asked Jesus, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders? Instead they eat bread with unclean hands.”

¹⁴He called the crowd to him again and said, “Everyone, listen to me and understand. ¹⁵There is nothing outside of a man that can make him unclean by going into him. But the things that come out of a man are what make a man unclean.

²¹“In fact, from within, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual sins, theft, murder, ²²adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, slander, arrogance, and foolishness. ²³All these evil things proceed from within and make a person unclean.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in the movie, “The Sound of Music, Julie Andrews sang that memorable song that no doubt everyone has heard and can sing along with, “Doe Re Mi.” It starts with a line that I thought of as I studied the text before us this morning: “*Let’s start at the very beginning, a very good place to start.*” Whether learning to sing, or dance, how to count or read, for anything, if you don’t start at the beginning, there’s a good chance the lesson won’t be understood or “stick.” That makes sense. It’s logical.

And, the same is true when it comes to what Jesus talks about here: pleasing our God. If all we are doing is changing our actions, a person may look the part of an obedient child of God, but if their heart is still rotting in sin, God isn’t pleased in the least. We have to go back to the very beginning, the beginning of our actions, to their roots — the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. That’s where it all begins.

Maybe you’re thinking though, wait a minute, my thoughts are just my thoughts, they don’t hurt anyone. And humanly speaking, that’s true. A police man isn’t going to pull you over for *wanting* to speed. You won’t receive any jail time for *thinking about* robbing a bank. But then we get to

what God’s word says, what Jesus himself said: **anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and anyone who even looks at someone lustfully — in God’s eyes — is an adulterer.** In God’s eyes there is no difference between a sinful action and a sinful thought. They are both sinful, both just as damnable.

That’s the point Jesus was making to the Pharisees. They were men convinced of their own righteousness, that is, being perfect in God’s eyes all on their own. Thinking they had their lives before God in complete order, now they could nit-pick at everyone else’s, including and especially, Jesus’ disciples.

Jesus painted for them, and us, a pretty bleak picture. No, no, no, it’s not just about your actions, but **from *within*, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual sins, theft, murder, ²²adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, slander, arrogance, and foolishness. ²³All these evil things proceed from within and make a person unclean.** It felt a little funny a few moments ago reading those words of Jesus and then saying, “**This is the Gospel of the Lord.**” Really Jesus? That’s where you’re going to leave us? No hope from within, no good news, nothing to give my self esteem a little boost to pull myself up?

Of course not! As David said in Psalm 53:3 **There is no one who is good, not even one.** And this is why: No matter how the law has curbed our habits and kept our sinful natures from sinning publicly for all to see, at the end of the day there is nothing in us that gives us hope. Nothing in us that could be even *mistaken* for good news. Nothing that can give me the power to pull myself out of the depths of sin and despair.

Jesus painted this bleak picture for the Pharisees who always looked to themselves for the answer, and for us, who have a little pharisee in us that tries to latch on to anything in us and say, “See! I am doing it, I am pretty good, all on my own.” That’s why God loves me. That’s why I’m going to heaven.

Those Pharisees, who in many peoples’ eyes were the most obedient people on the face of the earth, at the very least went away from Jesus with something to think about. “If not even we Pharisees are good enough in God’s eyes, what hope does anyone have?”

This morning Jesus has set us up for failure, on our own, so that we have no where else to look...but to him. Only with a heart that looks only to Jesus, only to God's promises, only to God's love, only to what God has done *for* me, for my salvation, can I begin to please God with my actions.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, we will sing in a few moments after the sermon. How does God create a pure heart in such a sinful body? Through the Gospel. Through the message of Jesus who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and so, born of Mary with an already pure heart.

Jesus never sinned, never had a sinful word or action, not even a sinful thought. He was perfect not only in the sight of man, but in God's eyes too, for us. He didn't just honor God and his will and his law with his lips. He was, through and through, in every way, righteous, holy, right, and true.

It's only after we see how perfect we must be to keep God's law that we really can appreciate just what Jesus did for us. He did the impossible, what we could never do. He was perfect for us. But he didn't stop there.

He died for all our sins. All the ways that we have broken God's law, been disobedient, failed to please him, and oh yeah, that whole list I read a moment ago of all the evil that proceeds from our hearts — for all of it, he suffered God's punishment, his anger, his wrath, for us in our place.

It was in baptism that God connected us to Jesus' life and death for us. The Holy Spirit took our dead, rotting-in-sin hearts and brought them to life, through water and the Word — new life by faith in Jesus. There at the font, all the benefits of Jesus' life and death became ours, yours — the forgiveness of sins, new life before God, eternal salvation.

It's through that Gospel message in Word and Sacrament that God gave us new hearts that live for him. Hearts that desire what he desires. Hearts that want to do nothing but please him. Hearts from which now flow actions that are God-pleasing because they are rooted in faith in the one who was perfect for us, who died in our place, Jesus as our Savior.

And when we stumble, as we so often do as sinners, he doesn't come and rip out our hearts looking for a new host, a better host that will obey. No! He says, "Come to me. Repent of your sins and be made new again. Turn from the sinful ways of this world and the sinful ways of your past and be made whole again. Come and see again all that my Son has done for you. Come and hear the words of your forgiveness and only...believe. Come

and receive my Son's body and blood, given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of all your sins and go out in the power of my Holy Spirit to live a life of thanksgiving to for all my goodness."

There's a phrase that God uses throughout the bible for such a heart won over by this Gospel message. "**You will never be put to shame.**" Can you imagine being those Pharisees talking to Jesus? So confident, so arrogant, so sure that they were what God was looking for. And Jesus in about 2 sentences deflated it all. Whether they knew it or not, he put them to shame. He showed them just how sinful they really were, and they knew what he was implying — that they would face God's wrath and punishment because of how sinful they were on their own. In truth they had not lived up to God's law. How humiliating, to be thinking on the one hand that they were it, the pinnacle of perfection. And the people knew that's what they thought of themselves. And then, before the people, before this backwater messiah and his disciples, before God, Jesus showed them the truth — that though they were wearing beautiful robes before the people, before God they weren't covering up the ugliness of their sin. That though they had kept all their man made laws, it was all in vain, for their hearts were far from God. And if they failed to turn to Christ, theirs would be the ultimate humility in hell. immense and painful shame as they would be face to face with how wrong they were, but it would be too late.

You and I with our hearts won over by the Gospel will never feel that. We will never be put to shame. How comforting it is to know that in Christ we've got it made. Our sins have been taken away. All our deeds, none of which are perfect, even the ones done with the purest of motives, this side of heaven it's still tainted with sin. But in God's eyes, because our actions come not from a heart of sin, but from a heart of faith in Jesus, they are perfect and holy, as perfect and holy as if Jesus did them himself.

So, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let's start at the very beginning. It's a very good place to start. And it's a very good place to return to, lest we fall into the trap of the Pharisees and forget what makes our actions perfect in God's sight. It's not us. Go back to the beginning. To our hearts, hearts won over by the gospel, hearts that cling by faith to Jesus and all he has done for us. Amen!