

Evil Within

Parables of Jesus: Part 14 “Evil Within”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – November 21, 2021

Christ the King Sunday

Readings: Mark 7:14-23

Reflection: Psalm 100

Greeting: Lord, your word has been tried and tested. How we love your word and remember your precepts. Your instruction is true! Your commandments are our joy! Help me understand so I can live! Praise the Lord! (*Psalm 119*)

Prayer: Almighty God, the author of our lives. We yearn to hear the word that you have for us today. Help us to lift up our ears that we may hear you. Open our eyes that we may see you. Rest upon our hearts that we may experience your love more deeply so that we may share that love with the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 100 and hear of giving thanks for the Lord. In this season of Thanksgiving, how do you include God in all that you are thankful for? How do you share that thankfulness with those around you? How do you bless others with the love God shows you? Do you trust that God’s love and faithfulness endures forever? How can we share in the hope of Christ’s redeeming grace?

Prayer: O God, teach us to listen more closely. Guide us in understanding your ways so that we may grow together in wisdom. Help us to be thankful for your love and presence with us. Help us to rest in our risen Savior. Hear our prayers on this day, raised up in Jesus’ name, and show mercy to your children. May your Spirit guide us to peace and light everlasting. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Mark chapter 7 verses 14 through 23.

Then Jesus called the crowd again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God's sight; rather, the things that come out of a person contaminate the person." After leaving the crowd, he entered a house where his disciples asked him about that riddle. He said to them, "Don't you understand either? Don't you know that nothing from the outside that enters a person has the power to contaminate? That's because it doesn't enter into the heart but into the stomach, and it goes out into the sewer." By saying this, Jesus declared that no food could contaminate a person in God's sight. "It's what comes out of a person that contaminates someone in God's sight," he said. "It's from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come: sexual sins, thefts, murders, adultery, greed, evil actions, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, insults, arrogance, and foolishness. All these evil things come from the inside and contaminate a person in God's sight." (Mark 7:14-23 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So, we started the series on parables many weeks ago with a parable that Jesus explains to the disciples. And fittingly, we end with a parable that has Jesus explaining it to the disciples. In today's parable, Jesus calls the crowd and says, "Hey, listen. Nothing outside a person is going to contaminate them in the sight of God. It's the things that come out of a person that contaminate." And this is the entirety of the actual parable. And the disciples want the answer to this seeming riddle. What exactly does he mean? And so, Jesus goes on to explain that anything that you put into the body, anything that you eat, goes into the stomach goes out into the sewer. That's not going to contaminate you in God's sight. But the things that come out of you will contaminate because they come from the heart. That it's all the evil thoughts, all of the sins we commit. Our sins of the heart, not of the stomach. Now, one thing I want to clear up on this is that we often see this, and admittedly I have seen it before too, as a polemic against dietary rules. But I think that if we took it solely as that we would miss quite a lot that's going on here. Dietary rules are about keeping clean. Even trying to find what punishment there would be for violating dietary rules is difficult. I know with Thanksgiving coming up, food is often on our minds. However, today's reading seems to be talking about the difference between ritual impurity and moral impurity. We often put a big weight on clean and unclean, but I don't think it comes into play as much here. Lots of things could make you unclean. Burying the dead made you unclean, but that was important to do. Ritual impurity was something that would often just require, as the name implies, a ritual cleansing to be made right. Moral impurity was from the types of things that Jesus lists in our reading today. And the reason I want to clarify that is because sometimes we can get caught up in thinking that this is only about dietary rules. I would say that it was more an aside to the point Jesus is actually making in this parable. If you're going to be worried about what you're putting into the body, you should be even more worried about what's coming out. That if you are concerned about

being contaminated from what you eat, you should be even more concerned about the things from within. The evil within separates you from God.

I got to thinking about this. And I think that Jesus is saying an awful lot here because he's also saying that the things that come from within are things that we have the power to change. Some people like to rest on the old adage, "the devil made me do it." And for that, I would say "what was the devil doing in your heart in the first place?" Now, the problem is that these are things that just are within us. But they're also things that we have to choose. That it is from within us that the evil thoughts come. So I want to look at this a little deeper. Because, to me, this is saying if you're going to be worried about trivial matters, you should be extra worried about the most important matters. Because these are the things that keep you from loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself. These are not things that you can simply wash away. These are not simply things that you can undo by following a few sets of prescribed rules and getting back up and thinking you're fine. These are the things that lead us down into a path of destruction. But to me, it's also saying that we shouldn't be so concerned about the evil outside us unless we have confronted the evil within. That's where this really started to resonate for me because it's about an internal dialogue that we have to be willing to have. And it's important that we have that dialogue with ourselves. And it's important that we include Christ in that dialogue. Because we often think that we can overcome everything on our own. "If it's within me, I can take care of it myself." But can you? Can you stop yourself from having bad thoughts about others? Can you stop yourself from thinking about how much somebody upsets you? And having that impulse that you wish something bad would happen to them? I know I can't. Sometimes those things come unbidden and unwelcome but they're there.

So, the question arises, what can we do? And for me, the answer is, this is about how you confront those things in your heart. This is about how you take on that evil within so that doesn't become the evil that comes out. And it means being thoughtful. It means being reflective. It means acknowledging that those things exist. And more than that it acknowledges that we need God's help to make sure that we can change. It's easy for those things to pop up. It could be something as simple as somebody saying the wrong thing. And it upsets us. But it's our response, what comes out of us that's going to define who we are and how people see us. And the choice is then between love and hate. Am I oversimplifying? Yes and no. Are situations more complicated than that dualistic idea? Of course. But when we break it down, no matter how complicated it is, it comes down to those two things. Which one do we give into? And this happens every day of our lives with how we choose to think about others and how we choose to express those thoughts. And it also presents us with another problem. If we say all the right things, but don't mean them, are we actually confronting those problems that we find within our own hearts or are we simply masking them?

For me, this parable comes down to what we are willing to let go of and how we are willing to change. Not simply that we don't say those things, not simply that we don't act on

them. Yes, that is the important first step. If you feel like killing somebody, a good first step is to not act on it. But where do we go from there? How do we address that thought? Because that thought itself is a sin. That thought itself is something that we need to change. And this is where prayer and reflection come in. That we pray for Christ to step in and help us to change how we think, and then we figure out ways that we can change with Christ. Which means figuring out why we thought that in the first place. Why that thought even arose in our hearts and how we can change it. And this is one of the hardest things that we take on as Christians. Because of course we can say “well, I've never killed anyone, so I must be doing great!” And to that, I would say I'm glad you haven't. But does the anger still reside within you? Does that hate still have a place in your heart? And if it's there how else may be trying to come out? Does it come out in snide remarks and harsh words towards others? Does it come out with uncaring statements when someone else is struggling? Does it show itself as unkindness? As bigotry? As greed? Because all those things come from within the heart too. And sometimes those are much harder to recognize. But it means that we look at all of our thoughts and all of our actions and we look at them all through Christ.

One of the big things that Jesus is telling us in this parable is that we are responsible for our actions. If we can think about the food that we eat, and we think about how it affects us, if we think about the small things that we think impact our relationship with God, we have to be able to confront the big things. That we can't be content with thinking that if we clear out those small problems and we appear to be right with God, that we are right with God. Because appearances aren't enough because appearances can be deceiving. And one of the ways that we begin this journey is asking Christ to help us to be honest with ourselves. Now this issue itself, I think, is much bigger than I could ever cover in one sermon. I think it's bigger than I could cover in a year's worth of sermons. So today I give you the starting point. We confront the evil within by acknowledging there is evil within. And by acknowledging it, we are honest with ourselves, and we are honest with God. And that honesty allows us to recognize things that need to change. And that honesty opens us up to be willing to make those changes. As we discussed last week about change, change is a good thing. Especially in this context, because no matter how loving and how caring we may appear, if we carry around that baggage in our hearts then we aren't right with God because we are setting ourselves up for failure. Because we aren't willing to let go of the evil within.

This week we will be celebrating Thanksgiving in the many different ways that we do. And as we think about all that we are thankful for, let us also be thankful that God is there to help us address these problems. And let us take that thankfulness and turn it into action. That because we are thankful, we are willing to be honest in our hearts so that we are willing to change. Because we are thankful for the good things around us, we will find a way to change our hearts that we can be even more grateful for all that we have. That as we enter into the Advent season, we find a way to let Christ reside within us and be born again within our hearts that we may confront the evil within, and we may overcome. With mercy and gladness, with

faith and rejoicing, with gratitude and grace, that we may be thankful that Christ is with us. That no matter what may reside within us, as long as Christ is within us as well, we may overcome anything that may stand between us and God. And for that, I am truly thankful. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. May we find forgiveness in your love. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – *Parables of Jesus*

Our series is *Parables of Jesus* and will be looking at different parables that Jesus told. Each week I will ask that you read and reflect on the parable coming up. Feel free to discuss it with others or to get together to read and study. I would love to hear your reflections after the Sunday message!

November 21st – *Evil Within* – Mark 7:14-23

Our final lesson is about what comes from within us and our need to take care.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Andie, Ed, Alex, & Katie Kulach	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite
Lavada Markwell	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Gene Laymon	Tom Finley
Family of Martha Hurst	Family of Jeanette Carrell	Family of Mike Niebrugge	
Family of Lowell Cutright		Family of Lavada Markwell	

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