

**Barthol Chapel and Tarves Sunday 16 August 2020 9.45am for
10.00 am**

Order of Service



Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”

(Matthew 15: 10-11)

Introduction (from Christine McWhirter – former student minister)

I am delighted to be back with you sharing in worship covering for two weeks while Alison and Sean have their holidays. I hope you are all doing well and adjusting as we slowly emerge from the restrictions.

‘May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.’

(Psalm 67:1-2)

Praise CH4 63 All people that on earth do dwell

1 All people that on earth do dwell,
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.
Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell,
come ye before him and rejoice.

2 Know that the Lord is God indeed;
without our aid he did us make;
we are his folk, he doth us feed,
and for his sheep he doth us take.

3 Oh, enter then his gates with praise,
approach with joy his courts unto;
praise, laud and bless his name always,
for it is seemly so to do.

4 For why? The Lord our God is good,
his mercy is for ever sure;
his truth at all times firmly stood,
and shall from age to age endure.

The Word of God – Matthew 15: 1-20

¹Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, ²“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

³Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴For God said, ‘Honour your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ ⁵But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’ ⁶they are not to ‘honour their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

⁸“These people honour me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

⁹They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.”

¹⁰Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. ¹¹What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”

¹²Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

¹³He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

¹⁵Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”

¹⁶“Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. ¹⁷“Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”

Message

In Matthew 15, guess who had popped in for a wee visit with Jesus? It was the scribes and Pharisees ... the big wigs from denominational headquarters in Jerusalem. They had come to Jesus on a fact-finding mission – to find out if Jesus and His disciples were following their silly rules.

The scribes and Pharisees made religion an outward matter and not an inward experience. God's truth was trumped by man-made tradition. They were overwhelmingly concerned about the religious law and rituals, which included strict washing before and during every meal.

These rituals are mentioned in verse 2 of the reading as, 'the tradition of the elders', which were detailed rules of conduct and purity from man-made interpretations of scripture initially passed down by word of mouth until about 200 AD when they were written down in the Mishnah.

When we read in v.2 that Jesus' disciples did not wash their hands before a meal, we should not think they ate with dirty hands. They probably washed their hands clean before touching any food just like we do, for proper hygiene. What they did not do, however, was the excessive hand-washing ritual required by the Jewish religious leaders.

So, the scene is this - these religious leaders had come a long way from Jerusalem to visit Jesus and essentially interrogate Him about His religious practices. Most Jews of the day were intimidated by the Jewish leaders as they could make life very difficult for people if they did not toe the line. Jesus was not intimidated by them, however; He was bold and truthful in the face of their stale tradition. Jesus did not mince His words, He told them plainly they were breaking

God's commandments for the sake of their traditions and called them hypocrites, which was incredibly true!

The example Jesus used is in verse 5, about honouring your father and mother, "that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'devoted to God,'" This likely refers to the use of a 'corban', which is where money was set aside as a devotion to God and therefore could not be used to provide for a person's parents, however after the death of parents, they would simply claim the money back and use it for their own purposes.

Can you imagine this scene between the Jewish leaders and Jesus? The leaders had travelled a significant distance, likely to lay down the religious law and Jesus beautifully turns the tables on them, telling them off for being hypocrites. This is not done in private either, at verse 10, we are told Jesus called the crowd around them and told them, 'it's not about what goes into a person's mouth, but what comes out of it'.

The next part of the passage really amuses me. The disciples came to Jesus, probably shaking in their sandals that the religious leaders had been offended by Jesus telling them off, when their very purpose had been to take Jesus to task. I can just imagine the disciples saying something along the lines of, 'hey Boss, the big wigs from Jerusalem were really offended by you – you're on really thin ice here!'.

What gives me joy in my heart is that Jesus was not worried at all, and simply said, 'leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.' Jesus gave the crowd and the disciples re-assurance that the religious

leaders were not to be feared, especially not for the apparent breaking of their man-made religious rules which in **no way** honoured God.

Peter then asks for an explanation of the parable about what people eat.

What Jesus replied is very simple – that what a person eats does not change what is in their hearts in loving God. Nothing that someone eats can ever make them more, or less, pleasing to God. The only thing that food can do is to feed your stomach. The only benefit of washing hands before every meal is to prevent a stomach-ache, which is about common sense and basic hygiene, not religious rules. No amount of hand washing can affect a person's character.

How easy is it to look at a passage in scripture and think, 'ah well, that was how things were back in Jesus' day, we don't need to worry about that as we don't do things like that anymore'?

If we are truly honest, it is very easy to do that and most of us do act like the religious leaders from time to time. We have many traditions or routines as part of our religious or church life that are exactly that – just traditions and just routines, and if we strip them back to look, **REALLY LOOK**, at why we do them, how many of them can we honestly say we do them **ONLY** to love and honour God? I think we would be shocked at how small that number actually is.

I know of a church where all the elders had to be in black suits to serve Communion. When it was suggested to some in the church that this 'tradition' should be reviewed, there was a lot of angry objections. Black suits do not change what a person is truly feeling when they take Communion. Clothing cannot change a person's heart to find God's truth, neither can food.

With the Coronavirus restrictions we have been forced to strip back a lot of what we have been used to in our traditions and church routines. For most of us the loss of our routines has been very difficult because it is natural for us to develop routines.

Let me ask you this – how many routines and traditions in our church life do we really need to make an effort to re-establish as we move forward out of the restrictions and which ones do we not? Going forward, will we be hypocrites?

For example – if we prayed to Jesus and said, ‘we’ve got a set of hymn books we have always used to sing from, but they are old and in need of expensive repair – should we spend the money repairing them, or look for some other way to sing to God in praise?’ What do you think Jesus would say?

This passage really reminds us that faith and our journey with God is an inward matter, from our hearts. Which traditions and routines genuinely affect our hearts and which ones are just food for our stomachs? Not an easy question for any of us to answer, but an essential one. May God be in our hearts, minds and souls as we each think about this question, and give us courage to be bold and stand up in the example of Jesus to stop the traditions which in no way honour our loving, gracious and merciful God. Amen.

Pointers for prayer

- Those suffering from or bereaved by the corona virus
- All key workers, those adjusting to working from home and those who are returning to their workplace

- The governments in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and their advisers as they seek to guide us out of the restrictions
- Those who are taking some time for holidays, especially remembering Alison and Sean as they take their holidays
- The pupils and staff of schools as they return to their school life routine
- Businesses struggling and all who are facing redundancy and financial hardship
- Family, friends and neighbours, those most affected by the restrictions and those finding it difficult to move forward
- Those affected by the train derailment at Stonehaven
- Those in Beirut affected by the chemical explosion
- Churches as each take difficult decisions whether to re-open for worship and how best to implement health and safety measures
- The Church that we might offer a faithful, loving witness to Christ through this time

Praise CH4 804 – You shall go out with joy

You shall go out with you and be led forth with peace,
 and the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you.
 There'll be shouts of joy, and the trees of the field
 shall clap, shall clap their hands,
 and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
 and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
 and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
 and you'll go out with joy.

Blessing