

# Bible study on Mark 7.1-8,14-15,21-23

## Begin with an opening prayer

Unchanging God,  
refresher, healer and restorer,  
give us wisdom and discernment today.  
We come to seek you and to hear you,  
to be still and present with you,  
to be transformed.  
**Amen.**

## Read the passage

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

## Explore and respond to the text

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

### Bible notes

The way the lectionary cuts up Mark 7 is slightly troubling. In leaving out verses 9-13 it strips verses 6-8 of their context and makes it sound like a baseless attack on decent people. That said, this is an account of a sparring match between Jesus and the Pharisees over the Law (what Moses had set before the people in Deuteronomy).

The encounter comes in the wake of the feeding of the five thousand. The crowd is still buzzing with the fall-out from that, the disciples are still trying to get their heads round what happened on the hillside and in the boat in the storm – and the Pharisees nit-pick over handwashing. Jesus is having none of it. He explodes at them with a citation of Isaiah 29.13 and an assault (in vv.9-13) on their practice of allowing people to join their group, commit some loose change to the cause, and declare everything they own belongs to God (though they still control it) as a way of getting out of their obligation to look after their parents.

Inevitably what began as a dispute with the Pharisees draws an audience and Jesus talks to the crowd (v.14). It seems that his agenda is to challenge the authority of the

Pharisees to interpret the Law; so, this is high stakes stuff. What he says is pretty obvious: what you eat doesn't defile you, it's what you say and do that does that, how you treat people (vv.9-13 being a good example). In both Greek and Hebrew thinking, the heart is the seat of thought and action; so, what you put in the heart will determine what you will think is right, and how you live in the light of it.

Again, the lectionary misses out the key verse (v.19 – indeed, a key section: vv.17- 19). Here Mark makes a general point out of what Jesus is saying, namely that all foods are clean; nothing is on the proscribed list. For Mark's Roman readers this means that pig meat, the staple of Roman cuisine, is still on the menu – good news indeed!

## Reflection

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

We do not know whether anyone in the crowd saw the woman touch Jesus' cloak, though Jesus certainly The Sunday tabloids thrive on catching a celebrity or politician doing something in private that they have condemned in public. 'Hypocrite!' the headlines roar, and the story unfolds with smug satisfaction that someone has been caught out. It seems that there are many in our society willing to point the finger at the failings of others; sadly, some of those attitudes rear their heads in our churches too. Hypocrisy is what Jesus accused the Pharisees of – but is it the same thing? Does anything in this story help us navigate the often murky moral landscape of our workplaces, neighbourhoods and churches? Is there a difference between what Jesus does and what the tabloids do, Sunday by Sunday?

## Questions for reflection

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.*



- Is the handle on the outside or the inside – how can you tell?
- What we show of ourselves on the outside reflects what is within – what do other people see in us?
- How can we make sure our values shape our choices and decisions?

## Prayer

### A prayer of thanksgiving

Thank you, Lord, for our communities.

Thank you that you have set us where you want us to be.

Thank you for those who support us.

Thank you that you give us strength to help each other.

Thank you that you can turn us inside out as we work together to make our communities the places you want them to be.

Thank you for the strength to be doers and hearers of the word.

Thank you that every perfect gift is from you. Amen.

**Amen.**

### A prayer to end the Bible study

Lord, go with us into our everyday lives,  
to honour you in all that we do and say.

May our being and doing reflect your love and your grace.

And when we next meet, may we recognise with thanks  
the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**