

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Mark 7:1-23
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 September 2, 2012

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

How do you see Jesus/God in the **world around you?**

- Beauty of creation
- Miracle of rising sun
- How a seed can become an apple
- How a burned-over forest can become green again
- How the rain falls to renew the earth
- How the planets revolve around the sun

How do you see Jesus/God in the **people around you?**

- How Mom and Dad love and care for us
- How Mom and Dad treat other people
- How Teachers welcome us back to school
- How people at church help us to learn about God's love
- How people with enough food share with people who are hungry

How do people see Jesus/God in **you?**

- How you welcome new kids to your school/daycare
- How you treat your parents with love and respect
- How you share your stuff with others
- How you care for people who get hurt or are sad
- How you forgive people who hurt you

It sounds to me like God is very busy in our world. Thanks be to God.
 Thank you for letting God move through you. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Fifty-seven thousand people who were convicted of first or second degree murder were paroled in the United States during the past ten years. And according to the report on **Minnesota Public Radio** this past week, **0%** of them have committed another murder. Every one of these paroled murderers had spent from **20-30 years in prison** prior to being released. The researchers and prison staff members said that almost every person imprisoned for murder turns into a model inmate behavior-wise. Why? It seems like every one of them, **longs to be set free and to get a second**

chance at life. Any bad prison behavior on their record will almost certainly mean no parole. Should there be a second chance for murderers? Can a decent life still be salvaged? Do you think Jesus might be a part of that?

I read in the **Brainerd Dispatch** that Minnesota prison inmates are now being given the chance to spend some of their incarceration working in **vegetable gardens**. **Cory Schilling** is spending six years in **Red Wing** state prison on a **felony drunken driving** conviction after an earlier criminal **vehicular homicide conviction**. Schilling says, **“It started off as something I was going to do to pass some time and it ended up, like, starting this passion for being of service to people, and I never even expected that.”** If I understand this correctly, somebody died because of his drunken driving and now he is working in a prison garden where the vegetables are being distributed to food shelves for hungry people.

Catch this. “For Schilling, who hopes to go back to a forestry job near Sauk Centre when he gets out of prison next year, he said gardening gave him a chance to **‘help pay down the debt’** of his offenses. It is bringing back childhood memories of gardening with his grandmother and relying on a food shelf to stay fed. **‘There is a common feeling among all the members that we are sitting in prison and still helping the community in positive ways,’** he said. **‘Everyone takes pride in that.’**” Schilling plans to keep gardening when he gets out. His gardening is reminding him of his **grandmother** (perhaps his best care-giver) and of the **food shelf** which was the source of some of his own childhood food. Minnesota has **9,300 prison inmates** as we speak. Wow, if only there were more life-giving gardens. Maybe this experience will be enough to set him free from alcoholism as well? Do you think that Jesus will be a part of that?

Same old, same old – Jesus is under attack again. In our gospel text for today, the Pharisees and scribes have confronted Jesus. They have already determined that he is **devil-possessed** and **needs to be killed**. Now they are looking for the evidence that will do Jesus in. You heard it; they are questioning why Jesus’ disciples are eating without carrying out the proper ritual hand-washing. These Pharisees are probably well-intentioned. They are struggling to save the Jewish faith and the Jewish nation. They are seeking to bring all of life into God’s saving realm. The hand washing and a host of other traditions are meant to be a **mark of respect honoring God’s presence in every part of the creation**.

Disrespect for these traditions could lead to the crumbling of the whole faith and nation.

Hand-washing – Jesus attacks their tradition as being merely a human invention. It isn't a bad thing, but it is not a necessary thing either. It is not something that God asks of them. In Jesus' day, the **Pharisees** subscribed both to the **written law** (Ten Commandments being supreme) and to the **oral tradition** (which they believed had been passed down to Moses by word of mouth and then carried on in that same way for centuries.) The **Sadducees** and apparently Jesus believed that only the written word, law, had come directly from God.

Here is the big difference between what the Pharisees were grumbling about and what Jesus was teaching about. For the Pharisees, the **relationship between God and the people of the world is mediated by the law**. The law is the bridge that can bring God and people together. For Jesus, **the relationship between God and the people is mediated by Jesus**. And it is this Jesus whose desire to heal and to save acknowledges **no boundaries**. Jewish dietary laws are seen by Jesus as **barriers** to extending the family of God and for bringing back the people who have strayed. **Are there any barriers here that stand between God and people? Any things that might prevent people from experiencing a life-giving relationship with God?**

Jesus tells his critics that purity in God's eyes is a **matter of the heart** far more than it is a matter of **outward, religious actions**. The **importance of hand-washing** pales in comparison to the **problem of human sinfulness**. Jesus points out our sinfulness in the little list that he gives to them. Jesus proceeds to detail a host of ways that our action causes harm to others, to ourselves and to our relationship with God. I got out my Bible dictionary, Luther's Small Catechism and Webster's to check these out. As I read them, please keep mental track. **How many of these Ten Commandment type prohibitions have you perhaps broken in the past few months?** There are twelve altogether.

- **Fornication** – any sexual activity outside the marriage relationship.
- **Theft** – stealing, larceny – maybe taxes or poor work performance.
- **Murder** – Jesus said if you hate someone, you've killed them...

- **Adultery** – Jesus said if you lust after someone = adultery. Luther said that adultery happens whenever we treat our spouse with something less than respect...
- **Avarice** – greed for wealth.
- **Wickedness** – sin, in opposition to God’s benevolent purposes for the world.
- **Deceit** – lying, misrepresenting the truth.
- **Licentiousness** – lacking moral discipline or sexual restraint.
- **Envy** – feeling of discontent and resentment aroused by another person’s desirable possessions or qualities.
- **Slander** – gossip, to utter damaging reports about another person whether they are true or not.
- **Pride** – conceit, arrogance or disdain.
- **Folly** – lack of good judgment, foolishness.

Okay, there is the list. How are you doing? Did you get through without breaking any of these commands? I break one or more of these every day. **“What, and we hired this guy to be our pastor?”**

While Jesus is trying to save the whole world, the Pharisees are worried about hand washing rituals. They were trying to save the people of Israel, but Jesus knew that hand washing wasn’t going to be enough. His list of sins only just further underscores our need for forgiveness, healing and God-given new starts again and again. Our world doesn’t need more rules. It needs a Savior! My name is written all over the list of vices. I need a God who can love me just as I am. I need a God who won’t give up on me because I’m not perfect. **I need a God who refuses to let go of me no matter how many times I fall, fail or forget who it is that gives me life.**

Is there any way to stop murders? What can happen to prevent folks from becoming chemically dependent and claiming innocent victims in car crashes? What about our young people, what sort of a God do they know?

An article from Esquire magazine was forwarded to me. It is entitled, **“What If Jesus Meant All That Stuff?”** The author, **Shane Claiborne**, an evangelical Christian, is founder of a ministry for the poor called, **“The Simple Way.”** In his article, he writes an apology to **“all my nonbelieving, sort-of-believing and used-to-be believing friends.”** He writes, **“I am sorry that so often the biggest obstacle to God has been Christians. Christians who have had so much to say with our mouths and so little to show with our lives. I am sorry that so often we have forgotten the**

Christ in our Christianity.” He goes on to recount episodes where he has seen God portrayed as a monster sitting ready to consume sinners.

Claiborne sites a study where he says that **“the top three perceptions of Christians in the U.S. among young non-Christians are that Christians are:**

1. **Antigay,**
2. **Judgmental,**
3. **Hypocritical.**”

I don't know if his survey is true. What do you think? When young people think about the Christian church, what perception do they have? The Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 13, talks about the deepest treasures of Christian people as being **faith, hope and love.** These three will carry us over into eternity. Claiborne spends most of his piece lifting up the Jesus who welcomed, loved and gave life to sinners. When people look at our church, at you and me personally, what do they see? Can they get a **glimpse of Jesus?** Or is it **hand-washing?** The Jesus that I know wants to come ever so close to each and every one of us. Does Jesus visit federal penitentiaries? Does Jesus visit Aitkin High School?

Shane Claiborne concludes his article. **“In fact, the entire story of Jesus is about a God who did not just want to stay “out there” but who moves into the neighborhood, a neighborhood where folks said, ‘Nothing good could come.’ It is this Jesus who is accused of being a glutton and drunkard and rabble-rouser for hanging out with all of society’s rejects, and who died on the imperial cross of Rome reserved for bandits and failed messiahs. This is why the triumph over the cross was a triumph over everything ugly we do to ourselves and to others. It is the final promise that love wins.’**

It is this Jesus who was born in a stank manger in the middle of a genocide. That is the God that we are just as likely to find in the streets as in the sanctuary, who can redeem revolutionaries and tax collectors, the oppressed and the oppressors... a God who is saving some of us from the ghettos of poverty, and some of us from the ghettos of wealth.”

So, dear friends in Christ, is it **“turn or burn?”** Is it, **“Stop sinning or languish in hell for all of eternity?”** Or, is it, **“Welcome home sinner. I’ve saved a place for you at my table precious child. Come and live your life fully in my embrace. Dwell in the love, forgiveness and power of my grace?”**

Are our kids learning the judgment of God or the love of God? Are our kids learning that God truly cares about them, their families and their future? Are they getting daily glimpses of Jesus through us?

I think we need some milk and cookies. This coming Wednesday, 6:00 p.m., I have invited our **age 2-Kindergarteners** and their parents to join me for milk, cookies and a Bible story. Soon our congregation will be presenting these little people and their families with wonderful **Bible story books** to use at home. On Wednesday, I want to model for them the possibilities of **sharing Jesus' love together at home**. I want them to be **empowered to carry God's love with them out into the world**. I want them to be **absolutely sure that Jesus is holding onto them and will never let them go**. I want them to be **equipped to live as free, loving, caring people of God** for the rest of their lives and for all of eternity. **You want that too don't you?**

Will you help? This time we need some **milk**, some **cookies**, maybe a **pot of coffee**, **someone to serve** these to the little ones and their families. If you want to make that kind of a difference in someone else's life, come up to this little stool after worship and **put your name on my service sheet**. This time we need milk, cookies and coffee. **Next week** we will be looking for **more people** to step up and make a Godly difference with our kids. We will be looking for **small group confirmation leaders**, **chaperones** for service or for fun events, **nursery care** people, **short-term presenters**, maybe even some **after school activity hosts**, etc.

"Hand-washing" or Jesus? My best hope for life is **me hanging onto Jesus**. No, my best hope for life is that **Jesus is hanging onto me**.

What HOPE shall WE share with OUR KIDS, with OUR WORLD?

Thanks be to God. Amen.