

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-9

Psalms 15

James 1:17-27

September 1, 2024

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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I deleted Facebook off my phone the other day. I don't want to open it. I don't want to read it. I don't want to be a part of it. Sure, there are some good things on Facebook...I still log on from my computer from time to time but I stopped the mindless scrolling. Because, mostly, what I see on social media is a whole lot of meanness.

Name calling, finger pointing, false piety and moral high grounds. There is no critical debate, no civil discourse, no ability to ask questions so that you might understand someone else's perspective. It's mostly..."they don't know what they are talking about", "those people are so misguided", or "they will believe anything".

And how often do you find that the big generalization of "they" includes you? It hurts.

I have had enough. It hurts to see friends talk about entire groups of people as though they know and understand them. The thing is, I know people believe they are doing good when they generalize. I know they are fighting what they feel is the good fight. There is a real fear that a way of life is being threatened, values are at risk.

But the thing is...the other group they are so fearful of, is also just trying to live their lives by the values they believe in. So, who's right?

I wonder how often we are loving the law more than loving each other. Or should I say, we love our interpretation of the law more than we love each other. And that dissonance has become downright cruel.

As we dig into our Gospel this morning, let me just say ...there is no way to sugar coat the difficulty of today's reading from Mark. Mark cuts straight to the heart of this kind of dissonance. He sums it up with one very biting word...hypocrite.

Simply defined, a hypocrite is a person who *pretends* to have virtues and morals but when put to the test doesn't live into what they say they believe. They make assumptions. They judge. They claim higher ground when they feel other people around them have fallen short of their compass of right and wrong.

As I thought about hypocrisy, I realized that, truth be told, we all get a certain sense of joy from pointing out the hypocrisy of others. We point one finger, then two, then three...and before long that one supposed hypocrite becomes a group of hypocrites, and then that group becomes an entire community of hypocrites.

But, what about our own hypocrisy?

We are always sizing each other up. Making assumptions and judgements to solidify our own opinions and beliefs so that we can be on the “right” side of the story at the end of the day.

This is the cautionary message of Mark. The “right” side might not always be the “best” side. And so we have to start doing some serious self-reflection to figure out where we have fallen into the trap of the Pharisees.

We find the Pharisees in Mark sizing up the disciples. They are angry that the disciples haven’t done the “right” thing and followed religious protocol. They *supposedly* didn’t wash their hands. I say *supposedly* because we aren’t told if the disciples actually washed their hands or not. We are only told that they were eating. And we are told that the Pharisees walk in and make an assumption.

The Pharisees started to point fingers. You haven’t followed the rules!

Jesus then turns the tables on the Pharisees. He calls them hypocrites for jumping to conclusions. They built an entire narrative based upon their interpretation of the law and didn’t take time to understand the situation. Maybe they were right. Maybe they weren’t.

Surely, the Pharisees were just trying to follow the rules. They were trying to keep order and do what they thought was the right thing. But in doing so, they failed to communicate. Their hearts became hardened.

It's a hard realization to take a close look at ourselves and recognize that at times our hearts, like the Pharisees, aren’t always as generous as we would like to believe. We are all going to judge and criticize. That’s human nature.

But Mark reminds us that we have a greater calling as people of faith. We have a call to examine our own hearts, to consider our own fear and apprehension, to be honest about our barriers to listening to and caring for those with whom we disagree.

I want to leave you with one way you can start to reframe those knee jerk judgements.

When you want to jump to a conclusion, when you want to point a finger or call out a behavior or opinion that makes your blood pressure rise...start by saying to the other person...tell me more about your perspective.

And then, listen to what they have to say with an open heart. Put aside judgement. Consider that even in our difference, most people have good intentions.

You will be hard pressed to find this kind of openness on social media. Such openness is counterintuitive to the fear-based culture we are living in. But maybe, just maybe, if we are willing, we can find a new way to live together, a new way to be in community, a new way to love and support and care for each other. But it won't happen if we relegate our safety to our computer screens and sound bites on Facebook.

It only happens when we sit with one another with openness in our own hearts to listen and to learn and to love.

Amen.