

Mark 7:14-23  
"The Heart of Man"  
14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 17B)

August 29, 2021  
First Ev. Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.  
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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

***[Intro: Follow Your Heart]***

Follow your heart. Oftentimes when people ask questions when looking for advice, the response is "follow your heart." You may hear:

- "You can't live a lie. You have to follow your heart."
- "Follow your heart. You must walk your own path."
- "You'll never find peace of mind unless you listen to your heart."
- "Your own heart never lies."
- "Trust your inner voice, your heart knows what is good for you."
- "There is no reason not to follow your heart."
- "Always follow your heart! When your heart feels at peace, rest assured, you are on the right track."

But is trusting your heart the best advice? Are we to always follow *our* hearts? Are we to always trust *our* feelings?

Thanks be to God, we have the gift of logic and reason. But our logic and reason is often flawed, due to our sinful nature.

Today on this 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Jesus gives us the correct answer.

So, would Jesus tell us to follow our hearts? Let's hear His answer, God's answer: He says, "***For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within, and they defile a person***" (Mark 7:21-23).

Ouch! This is a pretty ugly list. This is what occurs when a person follows their heart. According to Jesus, following your heart is the worst advice a person could give to another, since it is all about trusting your emotions. Instead, we are to be disciplined by the Word of God.

Naturally, our heart is opposed to God. Our heart leads us to do what we want, rather than what we ought to do, as God commands and teaches. Our heart's condition only leads us to condemnation, that is, eternal death apart from God.

### *[What Defiles a Person?]*

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus is defining what the word “defile” actually means. For the Pharisees, they believed “defile” meant ceremonially unclean. The Pharisees were focused on the external, the public display of ritual washing, rather than on a decent lifestyle. Jesus turned this definition upside down and corrected this error. Jesus said “defile” means “to make not holy, not set apart.”

As the Pharisees were more concerned with outward appearances, Jesus said it's not ultimately about that. This defilement has a source, and its source is the heart.

So, the real defilement is not just outward things – the words and deeds. The real issue is the source of these words and deeds. These actions – the words and deeds – are sinful and hideous because they come from an evil, ugly source – the heart, the source of your thoughts.

As the Pharisees were looking for only outward actions, Jesus ups the ante. For the Pharisees, this assessment of the Law is radical, unsettling, and offensive to any pious Jew.

So, Jesus rattles off a list that nobody wants to hear – the Jews then, and us today. Who would not feel guilty? Everyone on earth is included in this list of vices.

The first nine of the 12 vices deal essentially with the Second Table of the Ten Commandments, with sins against our neighbor: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, and envy. The final three deal with the First Table of the Law, with sins against God – essentially making oneself “god” and the focus of attention: slander, pride, and foolishness.

Our sinful nature certainly does not like this list of vices. Our sinful nature would like to run away from this list of vices and do just what we want. Our sinful nature says: “Follow your heart, trust your emotions.”

Through the Holy Spirit's inspiration, the Apostle Paul writes that those who do these such things ***"will not inherit the kingdom of God"*** (1 Corinthians 6:10). We have all certainly thought, spoke of, and done many of the vices on Jesus' list. So, are we doomed? No! God does not say that such people are ejected from the kingdom of God immediately. But God does say that those who continue in these sins are in grave danger of exclusion from God's gracious reign and rule, because those who do such things will not inherit God's kingdom, in the end.

This is even a struggle within the wider Christian Church on earth. This is what makes this list of vices even more difficult. Why do some denominations and churches say these vices do not matter? Why do some denominations encourage many of these vices? This often causes so much conflict and doubt – and frankly church hopping. Again, this all goes back to our heart. With the "follow your heart" mentality, many of us choose a church based on personal feelings rather than on God's truth.

### ***[The Clean Heart]***

In our Old Testament lesson, God commanded Moses to teach the Israelites and said: ***"You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you"*** (Deuteronomy 4:2).

God's commandments must be kept unaltered and untouched. Nothing must be added or removed. So, we should only lean solely on the Word of God, neither adding or subtracting anything. This still applies today – even if our sinful hearts do not like it. Moses said: ***"Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children"*** (Deuteronomy 4:9).

To this, Luther taught: "Watch yourself, therefore, as often as the Word of God is understood, so often it must be repeated. Scripture has two modes: the one, of teaching, by which we are wearied; the other, of exhorting, by which we are buoyed up. These two the Scriptures have everywhere."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 9: Lectures on Deuteronomy* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 57.

So, how do we follow God's commandments? We are only able to follow God's commandments when we trust that only God is the source of all that is just, right, and good. Apart from God, our hearts are the source of only evil.

Today's Introit gives us a big clue. After Nathan confronted King David with his sin, David recognized how thoroughly corrupt he was. He was corrupt because he followed his heart which led to adultery with Bathsheba. Even as he was thoroughly corrupt due to his sin, David trusted in His Lord for forgiveness. He wrote these familiar words:

*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin!  
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

(Psalm 51:7, 10-12; antiphon: v. 2)

Although David was corrupt due to his heart, he believed that only God could create a clean heart. We, too, can have a clean heart, but we cannot produce this clean heart by ourselves.

In order for us to receive clean hearts, God the Father sent His only begotten Son Jesus to take upon Himself our filthy hearts as He was declared guilty of all the sin and evil in this world. So, ***“for our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God”*** (2 Corinthians 5:21). This, Christ accomplished for us through His suffering and death upon the cross and His bodily resurrection from the dead, so that we – *by faith in Him* – would become clean.

Although His death and resurrection is where we become clean, God's grace is always flowing over, so He gives us so many other means by which He cleans our hearts.

You see, at each Divine Service, God purifies our dirty hearts through His Means of Grace – His Word and Sacrament.

Ultimately, ***“[Christ] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”*** (Titus 3:5). Through our Baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection, we were given Christ’s robe of righteousness that covers all of our sins. And when we do sin – *in thought, word, and deed against God* – recall your Baptism, confess your sin, and trust in Him for your forgiveness.

He also purifies us through His Word as Jesus proclaims to us: ***“Already you are clean because of the Word that I have spoken to you”*** (John 15:3). Even in today’s Gospel text, which is full of Law, Jesus is making us clean. He is making us clean through His very voice of warning. You see, God ***“desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the Truth”*** (1 Timothy 2:4). Even in this Word of warning, God is showing His steadfast love.

We are also purified through Christ’s very Body and Blood in and under the bread and wine, which forgives our sins and strengthens our faith.

Remember, when the Lord washes us, we are clean, we are as white as snow. With the Lord, no dirt of sin remains.

Through repentance and faith in God, Christ alone has taken all of our sins upon Himself and replaces it with Himself dwelling in us. By grace through faith in Christ alone, we are clean!

With our New and Clean Heart, we follow His commandments as we are disciplined by the Word of God. And when we fail, we repent and receive God’s forgiveness. With our Clean Heart, we are set apart as holy people as we live in the world, but not of the world. With the Clean Heart, outsiders may want to know who and what the true God is all about, since we love one another, including those who do not yet know Christ. With the Clean Heart, we love in ways that the world does not do. This is living out the Clean Heart.

Today, Jesus certainly nails us with our sin. He certainly sees right through us. But He also creates in us Clean Hearts and all by grace through faith in Him alone!

6 *By grace! On this I'll rest when dying;  
In Jesus' promise I rejoice;  
For though I know my heart's condition,  
I also know my Savior's voice.  
My heart is glad, all grief has flown  
Since I am saved by grace alone. (By Grace I'm Saved, LSB 566, stanza 6)*

Amen!

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠