

## Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.  
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.



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

*The struggle that every community in every age faces - including our own - is how can the "tradition of the elders," which has given us our identity, now be changed so that what was good in it - the desire live according to the will of God - can actually be expressed in our current circumstances.*

### Year B

### Pentecost 14

### September 2, 2012

*Sunday between August 28 and September 3 inclusive*

*Proper 17, Ordinary Time 22*

Read the passage at the bottom of this post: [Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23, The Message](#) or [Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23, The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click [here](#) for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Sermon by the [Rev. Dr. George Hermanson](#), "."

The lectionary ends its 5 weeks of dabbling in John and returns to Mark. No murmurs from me about this.

Once again Malina and Rohrbaugh provide helpful background on this passage. (Pages 174-176, see footnote below.)

At one level, the controversy here is between the Judean elite who were 5% of the population, and everyone else. The elites lived in towns and cities and had access, time, and money for the water needed to follow their interpretation of the washing required to follow the Torah.

The "tradition of the elders" is **NOT** the teaching of Moses as found in the Bible. It is the practice of the Judean elite which they are seeking to impose as **THE** one and only correct practice. And, as noted, the amount of water, time and money to follow those practices was beyond the reach of most people. And so most people were seen by the elites as unclean.

Jesus then quotes Scripture (Verses 6-7, and 10) to counter their challenge of him and his disciples. When we read it today, we need to be careful to read this as a condemnation of the Judean elites and not of "Jews." Indeed, the crowd of peasant Jews with Jesus were cheering him on in this confrontation. Jesus is condemning hypocrisy not Judaism, and the all-too-human tendency to make sacred cows out of human customs and traditions. (A problem which I'm sure all of our congregations will have risen above. So unfortunately this text will have no practical applications for us personally.)

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At another level, the question of what foods are proper to eat, what is the proper way to prepare them, and who are the proper people to eat with are crucial questions to determine, "Who is part of our group?"

Indeed, these very questions about food arise in Acts, and the community's new response opened the way for Jesus' followers to include Gentiles (non-Jews) like you and me.

The struggle that every community in every age faces - including our own - is how can the "tradition of the elders," which has given us our identity, now be changed so that what was good in it - the desire live according to the will of God - can actually be expressed in our current circumstances.

The "tradition of our elders" did not drop down, fully formed, from heaven. The tradition of the elders is **NOT** the will of God. Rather the tradition is our elders' distilled wisdom through generations of trial and error. Because it is distilled wisdom, it is instructive and worthy of careful regard.

Discerning what practices actually embody God's will are more often learned from getting it wrong than they are from getting it right. Our elders' experiences of how human short-sightedness, human pride, human folly, human self-righteousness, and human self-justification have dressed themselves in "God's righteousness" are painful lessons best learned from tradition and not from personal experience.

But the truly respectful response to the tradition is for each generation to take its place in the dynamic process that leads to the creation of tradition. To take our place in the process of distilling wisdom through trial and error as we too seek to name the "best practices" for loving God (whose love is unchanging) and our neighbours, strangers, enemies, and one another (all of whom are constantly changing).

David Ewart

[www.holytextures.com](http://www.holytextures.com)

Historical background information in this post is drawn primarily from Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, see link below, pages 174-176.

\* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

### Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, <sup>2</sup> they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. <sup>3</sup> (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; <sup>4</sup> and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) <sup>5</sup> So the Pharisees

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and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"<sup>6</sup> He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

'This people honors me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me;  
<sup>7</sup> in vain do they worship me,  
teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

<sup>8</sup> You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

<sup>14</sup> Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup> there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

<sup>21</sup> For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

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### Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 20-23 (The Message)

<sup>1</sup> The Pharisees, along with some religion scholars who had come from Jerusalem, gathered around him. <sup>2</sup> They noticed that some of his disciples weren't being careful with ritual washings before meals. <sup>3</sup> The Pharisees—Jews in general, in fact—would never eat a meal without going through the motions of a ritual hand-washing, <sup>4</sup> with an especially vigorous scrubbing if they had just come from the market (to say nothing of the scourings they'd give jugs and pots and pans).

<sup>5</sup> The Pharisees and religion scholars asked, "Why do your disciples flout the rules, showing up at meals without washing their hands?"

<sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, "Isaiah was right about frauds like you, hit the bull's-eye in fact:

These people make a big show of saying the right thing,  
but their heart isn't in it.

<sup>7</sup> They act like they are worshipping me,  
but they don't mean it.  
They just use me as a cover  
for teaching whatever suits their fancy,

<sup>8</sup> Ditching God's command  
and taking up the latest fads."

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<sup>14</sup> Jesus called the crowd together again and said, "Listen now, all of you—take this to heart. <sup>15</sup> It's not what you swallow that pollutes your life; it's what you vomit—that's the real pollution."

<sup>20</sup> He went on: "It's what comes out of a person that pollutes: <sup>21</sup> obscenities, lusts, thefts, murders, adulteries, <sup>22</sup> greed, depravity, deceptive dealings, carousing, mean looks, slander, arrogance, foolishness—<sup>23</sup> all these are vomit from the heart. There is the source of your pollution."

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