



GPS GUIDE: AUGUST 1, 2021

Grow. Pray. Study

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon: Lust

Mark 7: 14-23

Then Jesus called the crowd again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God's sight; rather, the things that come out of a person contaminate the person."

After leaving the crowd, he entered a house where his disciples asked him about that riddle. He said to them, "Don't you understand either? Don't you know that nothing from the outside that enters a person has the power to contaminate? That's because it doesn't enter into the heart but into the stomach, and it goes out into the sewer." By saying this, Jesus declared that no food could contaminate a person in God's sight. "It's what comes out of a person that contaminates someone in God's sight," he said. "It's from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come: sexual sins, thefts, murders, adultery, greed, evil actions, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, insults, arrogance, and foolishness. All these evil things come from the inside and contaminate a person in God's sight."

Monday: Read Exodus 16:1-15

As the people struggle to live in freedom after a lifetime of enslavement in Egypt it is remarkable enough that God responds to their need for God's promised presence, provision, and guidance. But God does something more in this passage. God designs and implements a plan to shape these former slaves into the people of the Yahweh. Prior to their liberation, the Israelites knew only life in Egypt, an empire where they constructed storehouses for food (Exodus 1:11), where they were exposed constantly to a hoarding, competitive ethos, and where human lives were abused and broken only to fuel the hunger of the elite. In this passage, God acknowledges not only the Israelites' need for assurance but also God's desire to shape them as a different kind of people, a different kind of community. In the ritual practice of daily gathering of food that falls from the sky, they will learn, with their very bodies, to come to trust their God; they will learn to share their basic human resources equitably. They will come to know a food distribution practice antithetical to the one designed by Pharaoh. And the keeping of the Sabbath will remind them that they are more than technologies of empire; they are human beings who, like their God, require rest and rejuvenation. Even in crisis, with chaos all around, Sabbath practice is essential to their lives and their emerging identities. How do you rely on God's mercy for your needs? In what ways does practicing the Sabbath help you rest in God? Give thanks for God's presence, provision and guidance in your life?

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for supplying my needs. May I trust in your goodness for my life. Amen.

Tuesday: Read 1 Corinthians 10:7-14

This passage is taken from a letter addressed to a faith community rocked by the arrogance and choices of spiritual smart alecks! It is clear from this particular passage of the letter that the lessons of history and the consequences of those considering themselves spiritual know-it-alls were designed by Paul as a means of pastoral warning. His instruction is focused on attempting to point out the dangers of improper spiritual behavior and the ways a true faith life can correct such directions. What is the governing issue or theme in this passage? Verse 7 holds the key: it is behavior, faux spiritual and otherwise, which is *idolatry*. Paul concludes this section of the reading by addressing the *nature of temptation*, something which idolaters consider or to which they will succumb. In doing so, he chides the Corinthians for thinking they have their salvation all wrapped up, with nothing to fear: “if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.” (verse 12). Paul is calling here for a strict self-watchfulness. He is calling for a lack of self-delusion about one’s spiritual life and the tendencies to idolatry. and for radical spiritual, self-discernment. In one of the most quoted verses in the Bible, Paul goes on in verse 13 to note several things about the nature of temptation. First, it comes to everyone (most reassuringly!). Second, that God will remain faithful to the one tempted. Third, that temptation will not exceed one’s strength to resist it — a debatable point some would say – and finally, God will “provide the way out....” When have you found yourself spiritually tested? In a spirit of honest self-examination (prayer, confession) have you considered those things that tempt you toward idolatry? How have you felt God’s work moving you away from temptation, remaining faithful to you in your struggle, or providing you with a way out?

Prayer: Strengthen me, Lord, to remove all idols in my life so that I may remain faithful to you. Amen.

Wednesday: Read 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20

Paul visited the community at Corinth between 45 to 51 AD. As he was leaving Ephesus, he wrote to the church on matters of some importance. Fellowship had deteriorated into cliques, in-fighting, and power grabs. Outside influences had challenged the core beliefs and morality of its members. A libertine philosophy had gained a foothold among some in the Church. In Chapter 6 Paul addressed this matter directly. After he acknowledged the freedom Christians were given (6:12), he argued that sexual license was not true freedom. For sexual license did not acknowledge the roots and responsibilities of such freedom. The roots of Christian freedom were found in the justifying grace God gave the believer. The Christian was no longer guilty, simply because he or she had a relationship *with* God. And, as such, the Christian was responsible *to* God. The person who claims sexual license was too self-absorbed to seek the roots of freedom or to exercise responsibility to someone greater than he or she was. The interesting part of Paul’s argument was his focus on the value of the body. This was purely Jewish in concept. The Greek culture in which the Corinthians lived downplayed the body and exalted the spirit. But, for Paul, the physical body had dignity as a vessel for the Spirit and a promise of the final resurrection. The body and spirit were inseparable. Bodies grow up. Bodies grow old. No matter the shape of our bodies, they are still God’s gift to us. They remind us where the Spirit dwells in the world. And they are a foretaste of our future on the final day. They reaffirm Paul’s contention that we belong to God, not to ourselves. Sit for a few moments and relax.

As you sense your body’s rhythms, feel your heartbeat, notice the rising of your chest while you breathe – give thanks to God for the gift of your body. Let those rhythms remind you that you belong to God.

Thursday: Read James 3: 1-12

Jesus has said that it is not the food you put in your mouth that defiles you but what comes out of your *mouth* (Matt. 15:11). In fact, in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus says that we will all be judged not only by what we’ve done, but also by what we’ve *said*. Not surprisingly, James elaborates on this theme at great length. In our reading for today, James elaborates on being “slow to speak.” He clearly thinks of words as having great power to destroy. In an interesting parallel to Jesus’ comment about what comes out of your mouth defiling you, James says that the tongue “corrupts the whole person.” Most of us can bear witness to the way in which words can literally destroy our whole lives and the lives of those around us. Once unleashed, harmful words are like a spark that ignites a fire and consumes a whole forest. Words of anger, where we say what we will very likely regret; words of gossip, where we say what may very well be true but ought not be said; words of slander, where we say what we know to be false simply to tear someone down; words of abuse, where we tell someone in effect “you’re worthless.” Harmful words like these “set the whole course of one’s life on fire.” I don’t know about you, but I’ve about had it with all the barrage of angry and violent and hateful words—words we say, words we post, words we use as weapons! I think it’s high time we put our words to better use—the use for which they are intended. Not only are our words intended to “bless” God (James 3:9) they are also intended to bless others! Paul says that we should speak “only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.” Our words ought to be *healing words*; they ought to bring grace and peace; they should build up and not tear down, heal rather than kill, encourage rather than discourage. When have you been hurt by harmful words? When you think back over the last week, have you used words to wound instead of heal? Make a plan to be more intentional about the words you use so that they may be a blessing to God and others.

Prayer: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Friday: Read Psalm 51: 1-10

Psalm 51: 1-10 is about the final chapter in the story of sin - its death and exit from its host - the once sinner, now penitent, and soon to be righteous teacher. The psalm does not speak specifically about the sin that has so destroyed the psalmist’s being that it needs to die and be re-created. But the superscription to the psalm identifies the sin as the sin of which the prophet Nathan condemned David in 2 Samuel 12, namely his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and his treacherous murder of her husband, Uriah. The superscription, which binds the psalm to a specific moment in David’s life, connects the act of repentance to specific sins. It reminds us that repentance has to do with particular sins, not simply sin in the abstract. The writer acknowledges that God is in the right to judge and punish him and laments that his sinfulness renders him an offense to God. So the psalmist approaches God and petitions for God’s mercy, faithfulness, and compassion (51:1). It is an acknowledgment that it takes the divine to put sin to death and to renew life when he says, Create in me a clean heart, O God! The Hebrew word for create (*br’*) has only one subject in all of the Bible: God. God alone creates in this way, and the word refers primarily to the creation of the cosmos: “In the beginning when God created (*br’*) the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Therefore, to use this word to describe the re-creation of the human heart indicates that it must be God who does this and that it is a feat comparable to the creation of the world. The sinful heart must be cleansed. It must, in a sense, also die with sin, so that, in its place, a new heart can be created. The psalm paints repentance as a kind of death and a kind of resurrection, not merely reformation but a radical new beginning. The Psalmist has done a deep examination of his

life and actions. Do you find it difficult to repent before God about your life and actions? How do you experience God's mercy in your life? In what ways has God created new life in you?

Prayer: Create in me a clean heart, O God. Amen.

Saturday: Relying on God's Mercy

Listen to and read the words to the hymn *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy*. The words are printed below, and you can click on the link to listen to the Riverside Church Choir sing the hymn. As you reflect on the words of this hymn what stands out the most to you about God's mercy? Are there patterns of living this hymn suggests we adopt if we are to take God's mercy seriously? How can you practice living in and living out God's mercy in the coming week?

<https://youtu.be/LfyZIJUHKpU>

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea.
There's a kindness in God's justice,
which is more than liberty.

There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven;
There is not place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given.

For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind,
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

If our love were but more faithful,
we would gladly trust God's word,
and our lives reflect thanksgiving
for the goodness of our Lord.



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