

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel Year B

God Has the Dirt on Us

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

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Analysis by Glenn L. Monson

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, ² they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. ³ (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands,[a] thus observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴ and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it;[b] and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.[c]) ⁵ So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live[d] according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" ⁶ 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; ⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

⁸ You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

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

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



DIAGNOSIS: Real Washouts

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Deluded

We really think that "the dirt" God has on us is nothing to be concerned about. We delude ourselves into thinking that "washing our hands" now and then of a few things will fool God. So we play pious games, pretending like children "playing church" that we are faithfully living according to the precepts of the All-Seeing and All-Knowing One. Our self-deceit knows no bounds.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Judgmental

Our faith in our own righteousness leads us to judge others. "How can you behave that way?" we say as we scold others who are doing just what we are doing. "You mean you haven't washed your hands of that!?" (e.g., the latest "-ism" of political concern), we say as we scornfully shake our heads. It turns out that we don't really give a rip about loving others, but only about

appearing to. Again, God is not fooled.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Heart Failure

God knows our hearts. The 'dirt' God has on us is filth that penetrates our deepest person – the human heart, as Jesus would say. It is not merely our hands or our face or our exterior that needs to be bathed, but our innermost self. As Jeremiah would say, "The heart is deceitful above all things; who can understand it?" In our failure to understand that depth of our uncleanness, we are left with only our own righteousness to claim, and it is far from sufficient.

PROGNOSIS: Washed Clean



Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Hearts Cleansed

God, who has always known the depth of our brokenness and sin, who has never been fooled by our blatant hypocrisy, calls us to a bath that truly cleanses us. In the waters of baptism, we are washed clean, even from within, and the righteousness of Christ becomes our own. As St. Paul said, "God made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God." Our filthy selves are given to Christ, and Christ's purified self is given to us. Christ's blood is the scouring agent we have needed all along.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Assured of Forgiveness

Made clean in Christ, we no longer need to trust in our own righteousness, nor do we have a need to announce to others their lack of righteousness. Instead, we trust in the righteousness of Christ, returning daily to the cleansing waters of our baptism, confessing our sins, and being assured that our daily bath is more than sufficient for the life that is ours to live.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Joyful

Rejoicing in the cleansing work of Christ in our lives, we no longer judge others, but instead, we invite them to join us in the tub! "Come, play in the waters of baptism with us," we say. "Come, and frolic in the cleansing water of Christ's love. Come and experience the freedom of being washed clean in the blood of the Son."