

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel, Year B

RULES NEED TO BE BROKEN

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Analysis by Mark Marius

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, 2they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. 3(For the Pharisees, and all the Jewish people, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; 4and 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.) 5So the Pharisees and the scribes asked Jesus, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" 6He 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;
7in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

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

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

21For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, 22adultery,

avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. 23All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

DIAGNOSIS: The Dangers of Following the Rules

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Difficulty Following the Rules

Rules. Do they create unity or division? We are encouraged to follow the rules for our safety, for a better life, for good order. But enforcing the rules leads to division. So often our enforcement is for the integrity of the rule (and tradition) that comes at the expense of the person. Those that follow the rules rightly are seen as righteous and the rule breakers as unrighteous. But whichever camp you find yourself in, you are burdened by the rules.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): The Rules Come First

Honoring the rule, or the tradition that has evolved around the rule replaces honoring God—the rule and life giver. When our hearts abandon God then they become a breeding ground for evil intention predicated on serving our true nature. Outwardly we may look like we are doing the right thing, but in our hearts we are defiled.

Step 3 Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Ruled out

Abandoning God is never a good thing. God ignores the words of our lips disguised as words about God (but not actually God's word) and instead looks to the actions that come from our heart. And because our hearts are defiled we have no place with God according to God's and our rules. We end up following our rules until we get what we deserve—punishment from God.

PROGNOSIS: Rule Breakers to the Rescue

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Broken for You
Jesus and his disciples are categorized as rule breakers by the Pharisees, who are in authority. We have been taught to keep away from rule breakers. But Jesus is hell bent on breaking the rules, especially the rule of death and punishment that we all follow. Instead of following the rules he is faithful to the Ruler—God. Jesus' heart is for God and for us, and he sees to it that righteousness is given to us through his death and resurrection instead of our futile attempt to earn it. He breaks the rule of the rules by fulfilling them all. Once that rule is broken our relationship with the Ruler is restored.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Breaking into
So now in our hearts, where evil intention dwells, the Holy Spirit intervenes. Sacramental living replaces hypocritical existence. Christ's presence now combats our selfish desires. We cling to the water, to the bread—broken for you, and to the wine that brings life through God's word. The Holy Spirit breaks into our hearts to drive us into the world.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Break Open God's Rule

Now rule breakers are unified by gathering around Jesus; there we worship the Ruler with our hearts and not just our lips. And the Ruler sends us forth to feed others—not because we have to do it to please our elders, but because we get to do what pleases our God. And if our serving doesn't follow the tradition of the past, we don't let that divide or stop us. Instead, we look into each other's hearts and see God's love, grace, and forgiveness ruling our actions.