

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

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; 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.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition." Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Tradition

I absolutely love musical theatre! I like to analyze the structure of musicals, how the creators put the story together to make it interesting and therefore tell their story with memorable impact. Some of the greatest and longest running Broadway musicals almost didn't get produced. In fact the script for one of these was outright rejected when first presented.

An author by the name of Sholem Aleichem wrote a story in Yiddish about a poor dairy farmer from a Russian village who was attempting to maintain his Jewish religious and cultural traditions as outside influences were encroaching upon his family's lives, particularly as his daughters were preparing to find husbands. It was an interesting story, which Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick turned into a wonderful musical. OK, at this point I am guessing that some of you, have probably guessed which Musical that I'm talking about. If not, here is one more clue:

If I were a rich man

Ya ba dibba dibba dibba dibba dibba dibba dum

All day long, I'd biddy biddy bum

If I were a wealthy man

Yes, that's right *Fiddler on the Roof*. Now, there were a lot of twists and turns in getting it produced. One of the producers that they tried to get interested, said to the writers that he really didn't understand what the play was about until the end of the first act. So they

went and rewrote the opening with the wonderful song and dance number called 'Tradition'. The main character says "How do we keep our balance, Traditions". You can find this opening, from the film version' on Youtube if you want to watch it sometime. Well, traditions can sometimes help us keep our balance, both other times traditions can freeze us into a type of inaction.

The Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker, who lived in the late 1500's, tried to describe a stable balanced system, which in many ways has informed Anglican theological thinking since that time. Hooker said that our faith should be informed by Revelation (therefore scripture), Tradition, and Reason. He compared this idea to a three legged milking stool, which can remain stable and balanced on uneven ground. Concentrating on one of these 'legs' only is a prescription for disaster. This was the conflict in '*Fiddler*', as comforting as the 'old; traditions were, they didn't always make sense in light of what was going on in the community or around them. If we keep on doing things in the same way simply because, 'that's the way we have always done it', that is an error in thinking - called a fallacy. We always need reason as part of the process, and a healthy dose of revelation, either from scripture or from reflection on where we believe that God is leading us. The time and background for the '*Fiddler*' story is a Russian Jewish community of the early 20th century.

They followed for the most part the traditions of the 'Pharisees'. So this Pharisaic Judaism and all the rest of their traditions connect with what was going on in today's Gospel reading.

But of course, having too much concentration on tradition can do much more than simply freeze us in time, it can ultimately prevent us from doing what we reasonably need to be doing. We can end up practicing religiosity, doing the right actions, but not having a life of true faith.

In the Gospel, a group of Pharisees are challenging Jesus, because his followers have not done the 'proper' hand washing ritual before eating.

Jesus, said, "I was told about you people". In the scripture we are told that he called the Pharisees, hypocrites or at least the Aramaic equivalent. We often use the word hypocrite in english, however the original Greek word really means an actor. Now there is nothing wrong with being an actor on a stage. Clearly an actor is pretending to be someone else. However, in daily life pretending to be some else, in this case a person of faith while all the while you are participating in evil acts is highly problematic. Jesus is trying to say that you can warp yourself in the veneer of seeming righteousness, but these outer things are of no accord if you harbour a dark heart.

So it's a call for leading a balanced life, and following the teachings given to us by our Lord, having a pure

heart, and living as best as we can into the Kingdom that Jesus preached about.

