

## Scriptures and Sermon for August 2, 2015 by Rev. Michael Grinnals

### Listening and Doing

#### **NEW TESTAMENT:**

**James 1:17-27**

<sup>17</sup> Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. <sup>18</sup> He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

#### **Listening and Doing**

<sup>19</sup> My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, <sup>20</sup> because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

<sup>21</sup> Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

<sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup> But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

<sup>26</sup> Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

#### **GOSPEL:**

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

#### **That Which Defiles**

<sup>7</sup> The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus <sup>2</sup> and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. <sup>3</sup> (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. <sup>4</sup> When they

come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

<sup>5</sup> So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”

<sup>6</sup> He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

““These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.

<sup>7</sup> They worship me in vain;  
their teachings are merely human rules.’

<sup>8</sup> You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

### **Mark 7:14-15**

<sup>14</sup> Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. <sup>15</sup> Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.”

### **Mark 7:21-23**

<sup>21</sup> For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”

**This is the end of our Gospel Lesson today!**

### **God’s Purposes for the Church**

- Mission: *Gathered to be sent’ and ‘answering God’s call to do something for others.’*
- Worship: *Praising God*
- Invitation: *To speak in a natural way about their faith and heal the hurt*
- Fellowship: *Enjoying the Word of God through each other*
- Discipleship: *Teaching people to dedicate their **whole lives** as generous stewards.*

Please Pray with Me

**Meet us here, O Risen Christ, in this time of reflection. As we have been baptized, Loving God, let us now be enriched as we rest in your presence and listen for your word to us today. Amen.**

### **“Listening and Doing”**

As we learned from the children today, it takes a **brain to listen!** How many of you have criticized someone in this church for what they have done? This is a hard question and often makes us reluctant to answer. The reason is that we know that in the scope of our Christian belief system we are supposed to be **encouraging** and we know that criticizing is not encouraging. It takes a brain to encourage someone. It is thoughtless to criticize them. Most people who criticize, think that it is clever or smart. It is neither. Criticizing is thoughtless and hurtful.

When we criticize it is almost always true that **we do not have all of the information available to do so**. Interestingly, the reason we don't have all of the information available is that the **information is withheld** from us. If we fail to ask the right question, we will not get the critical information to **make a decision or to take an action**. Then once we start to take action; remarkably, the involuntary information surfaces. Now we begin a series of false starts. False starts are not helpful, they are divisive. They distract us from our real goal: LOVE GOD AND OUR NEIGHBORS AND MAKE DISCIPLES.

James, Jesus half-brother, tells us that *“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,<sup>20</sup> because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”* This is wisdom and it is great advice. Sadly, we often overlook its wisdom and its value as advice.

The reason that this advice is overlooked is that **we are quickly losing the art of LISTENING**. Our world is overrun with soundbites and quips. Content is often filtered out of messages because we have come to **assume** that people cannot comprehend deep content. **As we lose the art of LISTENING we lose the skill of comprehension.** To

some sad degree, what we have come to believe about people, has come true; they cannot comprehend.

What if we changed all of that? What if we took the time required to **LISTEN** carefully, resist speaking quickly and put a check on our emotions? What would happen?

First our **comprehension would improve**. Second, our dialogues would be **more creative and innovative** because we would have more data available for decision making. Finally, **our decisions would be based in fact rather than in emotions**. We would inherently create a culture of PEACE, KINDNESS and SAFETY. An environment of PEACE, KINDNESS and SAFETY would become an environment of **trust and trustworthiness**. **It would be an environment that people would flock to!**

In Mark's Gospel lesson for today, **we can see by the actions of the Pharisee's** that their concern is not for God but for their man made rules. They are nit picking Jesus and the disciples regarding their handwashing practices. More specifically, they are promoting their own set of rules. In the scope of God, how important is handwashing?

In contrast, Jesus and the disciples are **gathered within the masses of people**. The Pharisee's challenge them by saying, "*Why don't your disciples live according to the **tradition** of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?*"

I am fascinated by traditions. As an interim minister I often ask congregations where a tradition comes from. It is remarkable how often congregations cannot answer that simple question. **This speaks to the comprehension issue again**. Why do we repeat actions over and over again if they have no meaning?

Sometimes we have to assess our traditions and evaluate their value in the current environment. This can be traumatic to some. The emotions attached to "We have always done it that way" are powerful. The hard question is whether our actions are louder than words. Are we doing what we are called to do? **Are we LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS and MAKING DISCIPLES?**

In the Star Wars movie the Empire Strikes Back, Luke Skywalker is challenged on the difference between the new and the old. While

investigating a potential meteor strike, Luke is ambushed by a monstrous, furry wampa, and manages to escape from the wampa's cave with his lightsaber, but soon suffers from the sheer-cold temperatures of the snowy wasteland and **the fact that the old Jedi technics aren't working today.** The spirit of his late mentor, Obi-Wan Kenobi, appears before him and instructs him to go to the Dagobah system to train under Jedi Master Yoda. Upon finding Yoda, Yoda puts before Luke a training regimen that is all new and seems impossible. Here is the Jedi Master's instruction to Luke about taking on a huge task.

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What we learn from Yoda is that we can no longer wring our hands and say we will try. We have to buckle down and DO! The only way that we can DO is to LISTEN to those who are DOING.

We can no longer just repeat the word found in the GOOD BOOK. We have to **DO** what those words ask us to DO. The Gospels tell the story of a man who is human and divine at the same time. The story tells us that he choose twelve individuals to help him with his divine work and he sets the bar excruciatingly high! He set the bar at **LOVE and ACCEPTANCE.** He asks these followers to **LISTEN** to him and **DO** as he asks us; and they DO.

Jesus is challenged many times by the Pharisee's. Each time he LISTENS carefully to their words and then points out their failure to DO what they themselves have written to do. **He calls these men hypocrites!**

If we fail to **LISTEN** to Jesus and neglect to **DO** what we are called to DO, what does that make us? In today's economic environment we must do more than we ever did in the past. That means DOING things that we have never done before. We can no longer afford to TRY, we must DO! We must think **creatively and innovatively** to determine how we can **become so valuable** to our community that the community will want to invest in us!

What is it, in the scope of our **belief system** that we could DO that would encourage others, show our love for our neighbors and make new disciples? What, in the scope of **faith practice**, could we DO that would cause our community to look at us as a model of a healthy, spiritual and

faithful community? What, in the scope of our **personal lives**, could each one of us DO to make those around us ask, “Why do you always seem so confident”?

When we implement our belief system, faith practice and personal commitment, we become the church!

**LISTENING** to the community will provide us with the tools required to **Love God and Our Neighbors and to Make Disciples**. By **DOING** what is required of us; “*To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*” we will become a church of the twentieth century.