

FOLLOWING YOUR HEART IS A VERY DANGEROUS THING TO DO**Sermon for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost, 2021****Mark 7:14-23**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Mark 7:14-23: ¹⁴ **When He had called the multitude to Himself again, He told them, “Listen to Me, all of you and understand this!** ¹⁵ **There is nothing that enters a person from outside that can defile him. Rather, the things that come out of a person are the things that defile a person.”**

¹⁷ **When He had left the crowd and gone home, His disciples asked Him about this parable.**

¹⁸ **He asked them, “Are you also so lacking in understanding? Do you not know that nothing that comes into a person from the outside can defile him,** ¹⁹ **because it does not go into his heart but into his stomach and goes out into the toilet?” — In saying this, Jesus declared all foods “clean.” — ²⁰ He went on to say: “What comes out of a person is the thing that defiles him. ²¹ For from inside, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual sins, thefts, murders,** ²² **adulteries, sinful desires, greed, wickedness, cheating, shameless lust, a jealous eye, slander, pride and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and ‘defile’ a person.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

A couple weeks ago was census night. Many of our members have made the comment to me that in the section on religion, “Lutheran” was no longer an option for you to check as your denomination. Instead, you had to write it down in the ‘other’ section. I don’t know why Lutheran was dropped from the list, but perhaps it is because Lutheranism is on the decline. It is probably one of the smaller recognisable Christian denominations in Australia, but it’s not the only denomination on the decline. There is a decline throughout all Christian denominations expect perhaps, for the Pentecostals. At the last census from 5 years ago, the Pentecostals were the only religion to remain steady in membership, while non-Christian religions like Islam and Buddhism continue to grow. I think the fastest growing religion in Australia is atheism. Anyhow, it will be interesting when the latest data is released.

While there is no doubt that the Pentecostals believe and worship the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet it is still disappointing that for most of them, they trust in their feelings or instincts when it comes to salvation. They trust in what they do and how they must respond to God’s grace. Pentecostal churches tend to emphasise the importance of personal and spiritual “experiences” such as “baptism in the Holy Spirit” and speaking in tongues, while we emphasise the importance and centrality of the word and promises of God in Holy Scripture, which remain true and valid regardless of our personal “feelings” or “experiences.”

Unfortunately, there are people who believe that *trusting your feelings and instincts* works in real life. This is especially sad when it comes to making choices between right and wrong. People think that if they follow their heart, it will always lead them in the right way.

Jesus taught the exact opposite. He said, **“What comes out of a person is the thing that defiles him. ²¹ For from inside, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual sins, thefts, murders,** ²² **adulteries, sinful desires, greed, wickedness, cheating, shameless lust, a jealous eye, slander, pride and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and ‘defile’ a person.”** According to Jesus, following your heart is a very dangerous thing to do.

The book of Judges in the Old Testament gives an account of some of the deepest, darkest, most immoral days of Israel. Cruelty, obscenity, and hardness of heart all reach their deepest depths in this book. The book of Judges ends with these words of judgment, *“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”* (Judges 21:25). Some of the most horrible things described in the Bible were considered *right at that time because people judged by what was right in their own eyes*. This is just another way of saying that *they were following their heart*.

If we take a few moments to think about it, it makes sense that it is dangerous to trust our feelings as a guide to the ultimate truth. Think about it. Do you feel the same every day? If your feelings change from day to day, does that mean that the truth changes from day to day? What about other peoples’ feelings? If you were to interview a hundred

people on any given topic, the odds are pretty good that you will get three or four different feelings on that topic. If you were to interview those exact same hundred people a year later, their feelings would have changed. Many of them won't agree with the answer they gave the previous year. Think about it. Would you really like to stake your eternity on a feeling that you have, a feeling that in all likelihood will change tomorrow, a feeling that varies from person to person?

This is one of the biggest problems in the world today. People base their ideas of right and wrong on philosophies that come from within. They don't ask, "Is this the right thing to do?" Instead, they ask, "Does this seem right to *me*?" "Does this make *me* happy?" "Does this give *me* pleasure?" It is all about what makes me feel good today. Our society thinks this is good, healthy, wholesome, and so forth.

On the other hand, Jesus says, "**All these evils come from inside.**" The Holy Spirit had inspired the prophet Jeremiah to say, "*The heart is more deceitful than anything else is. It is incurable. Who can understand it?*" (Jeremiah 17:9). After the flood, the Lord Himself had said, "... *what human beings think in their hearts is evil from their youth*" (Genesis 8:21). Our culture would like us to believe that what comes from inside of us is basically good. Not so the Bible. God's Word tells us that man is actually evil to the core.

I don't know about you, but this teaching *frightens me*. It means that while I live in this sin-filled world, I carry a traitor around inside of me. Jesus says that deep down in my heart is a source of evil, not good. Jesus says that I can't trust my heart for good. I can't trust my heart for truth. Jesus says that I can't trust my heart - that my heart is a traitor within me. I carry within me a deep core of rotten filth that is my sin. *It is terrifying for Jesus to tell me that my own heart betrays me.*

Perhaps the most frightening aspect of this rotten sin within me is that *I can do nothing about it*. Every righteous deed I try to do, every pure thought I try to have is polluted by the evil that is within me. I cannot help myself because my own heart betrays me and works tirelessly to drag me down to hell. What hope do I have against such a severe traitor? I would be lost forever unless I am delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation by a salvation that is beyond me - outside of me - greater than me. So I cry out with the Apostle Paul, "*What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this body, which is bringing death?*" (Romans 7:24). And with the words of King David I beg, "*Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your mercy! According to Your great compassion blot out my rebellious acts! Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and declare me clean from my sin! For I acknowledge my rebellious acts, and my sin is always before me. I have sinned against You, You only, and I have done what is evil in Your sight, that You may be just when You speak, that You may be blameless when You judge*" (Psalm 51:1-4).

Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!¹ God has sent His Son Christ Jesus into the world to take up our human flesh. Since Jesus is the Son of God and was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, He was born with a clean heart. He experienced all the temptations we experience, but He never sinned. Instead He took the sin of our hearts onto Himself and carried it to the cross. As He hung on that cross, He paid the price that God's justice demands of our sin. He suffered the punishment of hell in our place for us. We know that the price He paid was more than enough because the grave could not hold Him. His resurrection from the dead shows us that God is now ready to create a clean heart in each of us.

In order to create a clean heart in us, God first puts the old, filthy, toxic, sinful heart to death. It is as the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to say, "*Do you not know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death?*" (Romans 6:3) and "*We know that our old self was crucified with Him, that our sinful bodies might be rendered powerless, that we might not be slaves to sin any longer*" (Romans 6:6) and "*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their sinful natures with their passions and desires*" (Galatians 5:24). How does God work? Not from the inside, but from the external Word to drown our old sinful nature.

He then works in us to create that new, clean heart for which we pray. Again, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to say, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Look! They have become new!*" (2 Corinthians 5:17) and "*If we have been planted together with Him in the likeness of His death, then we shall be planted together with Him also in the likeness of His resurrection*" (Romans 6:5) and "*If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him*" (Romans 6:8). When the Holy Spirit plants faith in us, He does a heart transplant. He removes our filthy hearts of sin and replaces them with new, clean hearts.

¹ Romans 7:25

Now, although we have new, clean hearts, we still live in a sinful world. Temptations still attack us from all directions, and we often suffer defeat. That is when our new hearts convict us of sin and drives us back to the cross. There we once again confess our sins and receive forgiveness for all our sins. In this way, God keeps our new heart clean until He takes us away from this world of sin. On that day, the angels will carry us to His side in heaven. There we shall wait for the Last Day when He will raise the dead and take all who believe in Him into eternal life. In that new earth, we shall never be sinful again.

Each and every one of us was born with a toxic heart. It was a heart that loved sin and hated God. Over time our continuous sinning only made our hearts blacker and more toxic. There was no way that we could trust such hearts to guide us in the truth. Instead, God took our filthy, sinful hearts and destroyed them at the cross. Now through Holy Baptism, He gives us newly created hearts - hearts that fear, love and trust in Him above all things - hearts that turn to Him in time of trouble - and when temptations overwhelm us, hearts that confess our sin in the sure and certain knowledge that God loves us for Christ's sake and will forgive us. These are new hearts that will live with Him in heaven and rejoice before His throne forever. These are the new hearts that God has created in us. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, heavenly Father, You have raised from death the Lord Jesus, our great Shepherd, because His death fulfilled Your eternal covenant to save us from sin. We praise You for Your marvellous love and goodness, and pray that You would give us everything we need to know and do Your will, and to live to Your honour and praise. Come into our lives with the power of Your Holy Spirit. Renew in us a true and living faith in Jesus Christ Your Son, so that we may be completely united with Him, trusting not in our own goodness, but in the righteousness based on His death for us.

Keep us from fearing, loving, and trusting anyone or anything more than You. Fill us with love for You, which expresses itself in humble, loving service to our neighbours. Help us to act justly, to love mercy, and to live humbly before You, our God. Move us to show respect to everybody, to be generous to the needy, to share the burdens of the weak, and to act in sincere love to all people. Help us to pattern our lives on Jesus Christ. Make our words sincere and edifying, our lives pure and godly, and our relationships with others peaceful and harmonious.

Make Your Church so aware of Your countless blessings, especially the gift of the Gospel, that it may continually respond with thanks and praise. Inspire Your people to proclaim Christ's saving love to all mankind. Give our pastor a true understanding of Your Word. Give wise judgment to those in positions of leadership. Give us all a loving compassion to people in need.

Bless our country and its people, that mercy, truth, uprightness, and peace may be evident everywhere. Give us leaders whose concern is not to serve personal pride or party loyalties, but to be Your instruments of service to all.

Fill our homes with the joy of Your presence. Inspire parents with the Spirit of Christ, so that they may encourage their children by word and example to live godly lives and to find joy in serving You and their fellowmen.

Bless all good and useful employment. Give to all both satisfaction in what they do and a fair reward for their efforts. Teach people in all situations to remember that they are accountable to You for every word and action.

Look with pity on those who are facing trouble and trials, especially those Christians who are suffering for the sake of their faith. We remember those Christians who are being persecuted by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Give them the strength and courage needed to remain faithful to you.

Strengthen all the needy by Your mighty power, that they may remember that You are their only Saviour and help. Continue to watch over all those in our congregations who are weighed down by illness or worries. Remind them that You are a present help in all their troubles, and hear them when they cry to You for help and mercy.

Hear our prayers for Jesus' sake, O Lord, that we may praise You for ever and ever. Amen.

14th Sunday after Pentecost

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

¹ "Now, Israel, listen to the Statutes and Decisions that I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, enter

and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving to you! ² You shall **not add anything** to the Word that I am commanding you and you shall **not take anything away from it**, that

you may keep the Commandments of the LORD, your God, which I am commanding you! ...

⁶ “Therefore, you shall keep them and observe them! For this is your wisdom and your understanding that the other peoples should see. For, when they hear all these Statutes, they will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people!’ ⁷ For what other great nation has gods who are as near to it as the LORD, our God, has been in everything for which we have called on Him? ⁸ Or what other great nation is there that has Statutes and Decisions as righteous as all this teaching, which I am setting before you today? ⁹ Only be on your guard and watch yourself carefully, that you may not forget the things that you have seen with your own eyes and that you may not fail to keep them in mind all your life! You shall teach them to your children and to your grandchildren!

Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power! ¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the tricky schemes of the Devil, ¹² because we are not wrestling against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against those who control this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms! ¹³ Therefore, take up the full armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand! ¹⁴ Stand therefore, **having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness** ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the readiness that comes from **the Good News of peace!** ¹⁶ Besides all these, take up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One! ¹⁷ Take **the helmet**

of salvation and the **sword** of the Spirit, which is the Word of God! ¹⁸ Pray on every occasion with all kinds of prayers and requests in the Spirit! For this purpose, be alert with all perseverance as you pray for all God’s holy people! ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that when I open my mouth what to say may be given to me, that I may boldly make known the mystery of the Good News! ²⁰ Because of it I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak it!

Mark 7:14-23

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