

# Reflections for 29<sup>th</sup> August 2021

## 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity

Is not washing before eating with your hands a bad thing? The opening part of this week's gospel might suggest that Jesus was not very concerned about hygiene. The point though that Jesus wanted to make is that there are more important things for Scribes and pharisees to be concerned about than ritual cleaning of hands.

These religious leaders had come from Jerusalem to find out about Jesus; what made him so well liked, what he was saying and I rather think Jesus was frustrated that all they could comment on was hygiene rules. These were part of a host of man-made rules created for safe living and no doubt they would have been sensible and practical but Jesus felt they were taking these detailed rules far too seriously: they were taking these rules and treating them as more important than the doctrines of faith. In addition, Jesus went on to say (not included in our reading) to the pharisees that there were a number of these rules that conflicted with the ten commandments so the pharisees needed to be more careful about applying these detailed rules that had been developed over time and get real to the teachings of faith.

Jesus then talks to the crowd about bad things going into a person, perhaps a reference to his conversation with the pharisees about eating with dirty hands. He says nothing a person consumes can defile that person. That struck me as strange; if you eat something poisonous you will be at least unwell, if you don't die, so isn't that being defiled? What does being defiled mean? Jesus is considering what a person is like after getting something bad: how does that person react? What does the outside world think of the person? Just eating something bad does not make you a bad person to live with, unless you become an unpleasant individual. But Jesus, referring to more spiritual matters, talks about what a person becomes afterwards. He is not talking about food.

The person may have experienced or been told some unkind act or words. That experience does not defile that person: what defiles him or her is the way they act afterwards. In simple terms, if a person is told or encouraged to commit murder that does not defile the person; it is only if the person goes on to commit the offence afterwards that the person becomes defiled. We all live in this world and have experiences which we inevitably react to. Those experiences are what Jesus is referring to by saying what goes into a person. Whether a person becomes defiled depends on how he or she reacts to their experiences.

The focus that comes from the reading seems to be that we need to learn how to react to the environment about us in a proper way. The way we react will depend on many things but following the teachings of Jesus. We need to understand what Jesus taught and how he would love everyone. Loving one another and showing God's love for us, will help us to remain undefiled.

Jeremy Hopkinson, LLM

Lord, teach us to know your ways  
and to know your paths  
and lead us in your truth. Amen.

Bible readings: Deuteronomy 4: 1-2, 6-9; James 1: 17-27; Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, & 21-23

Story: 'The Two Houses' (based on the parable from Matthew chapter 7 & Luke chapter 6)