

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*August 29, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

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

*(Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))*

For the Jews in the time of Jesus, the greatest threat to Jewish identity did not come from military but cultural invasions. Alexander the Great spread the Greek culture throughout the Middle East. This spread is commonly referred to as Hellenism. Similar to modern day Humanism, Hellenism exalted the human form as represented in the Olympics which were often done in the nude. The Romans embraced Hellenism and viewed dietary and cleanliness laws as impractical. Hellenism was strong in the region of Galilee which is one of the reasons for the statement, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" This cultural conflict provides the backdrop to the dialog between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus' response would become foundational to Paul's argument for including Gentile in the early Church. Jesus' reaffirmation of the goodness of creation (nothing outside a person that by going in can defile) becomes the basis for rejecting Gnosticism which focuses solely on the goodness of the spiritual person.

Mark 7:21 "For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come"

Why do we let people and things make us so mad?

Is it because of a sense of injustice or frustration?

If we are right and they are wrong, shouldn't we be mad?

But what does God say about the matter?

If only God know what is truly right, could we both be wrong?

What if evil intentions are simply the desires of a selfish and self centered child?

What if we prayed not my will or my desires but yours Father?

## **Commentary on Song of Solomon 2:8-13** *(Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))*

Moving from the history of David and Solomon, the lectionary turns to the wisdom literature traditionally associated with Solomon. While the authorship is debated, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon all reference Solomon as their inspiration. There more books in the tradition of Solomon which are not included because the majority of the text was not written in Hebrew. These books belong to the collection traditionally known as the Apocrypha. While Ecclesiastes speaks to the folly of pursuing physical desires above God, the Song of Solomon is a love song between the soul and God. From the earliest days of the Christian Church, the Song of Solomon has been viewed as a love song between God and the Church which is called the Bride of Christ. The intimacy expressed in the Song has been interpreted as the intimacy that occurs between the soul and God when the soul enters into the mystery of God. Due to the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Solomon, this is the only time the Song of Solomon is included in the lectionary readings.

Song of Solomon 2:11 "for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone."

What does it mean for the winter to be past?

Is it not only warmth but also a time for planting and new beginnings?

What if winter is simply a metaphor for waiting?

Does waiting for Jesus to come feel like a long winter?

What does this passage mean for us who are waiting?

## **Commentary on James 1:17-27** *(Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))*

James is famously known as the "Epistle of Straw". While Martin Luther was making the argument that we are saved by faith and not by our own works, those who debated him began to quote

James which Luther called straw. Unfortunately, this had the effect of reducing the importance of James within the Protestant churches. A further examination of James reveals that works is the "first fruit" (vs. 18) of our faith. Once we are saved by faith, our lives should reflect that salvation in our acts. This transformation for James occurs when a Christian moves from being a "hearer" to a "doer". It is our faith that provides the mirror to our souls and convicts us of both our inability to save ourselves and God's desire for us to change our life. God's grace which empowers that change is God's "generous act of giving" which produces our actions. These actions then reflect God's will expressed in Isaiah 1:17 and repeated in James, "learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow".

James 1:25 "persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act"

If we are hearers, who are we listening to?

What if it doesn't just mean moral teachings but God's prompting?

Do we sometimes know God's will but are afraid to act?

What if we are the answer to the prayer we are praying?

What if praying means actually changing how we live?

### Sermon "The Heart's Lost Love" (*[Sermon Video](#)*)

In Genesis, it says that humanity was made in the image of God. If God is love as the Epistle of John states, then we are made in the image of Love. Since we left the Garden of Eden, every soul has longed to reunite with the Source of all love. Unfortunately, as the old country song goes we tend to look for love in all the wrong places. Sin blinds us to the Source of love and substitutes temporal loves instead. We seek love in wealth and power, in spouses and children, and in nature and our own creations. In short, we substitute worldly love for the eternal love our soul desperately seeks but nothing but God can fill our soul's one desire.

Fleshly desires and emotional euphoria can only temporarily gratify our emptiness. When these become unattainable or lose their power to numb our deepest desire, our intentions become distorted and evil. We take more and more with greed becoming avarice. The God given gift of sexual desire to produce offspring becomes distorted into fornication and licentiousness. When obstacles block these illusions of love, we turn to theft and murder. All our actions turn to pride and folly. Until we turn our hearts to God as the only source of love that will quench our deepest needs, our hearts will stray and no amount of moral laws or traditions can curb that sinful wandering.

As spiritual leaders, Jesus told the Jewish religious authorities that their focus on hygiene and cleanliness laws had nothing to do with defilement. It is our pursuit of everything but God that defiles us and makes us addicted to temporal loves. God, however, does not simply wait for us to come to our senses but seeks us in our confusion and calls to us in the darkness. Like the beloved in the Song of Solomon, Jesus calls to us to come away and leave our homes of false loves. The time of waiting is over. The winter is past and the rains are gone. The lover of our souls has come to claim His beloved. As deep calls to deep, so does God call to the Imago Dei (image of God) in everyone of us. The only question is whether or not we will stop our endless pursuits of empty love to hear and respond to the call of true Love.

The call of true Love demands a response. It is not enough to know that we are loved but we must also love in return. We must take the leap of faith and follow where our Lover calls us to go. Our faith lights the fire of love within us but we must then give off the warmth of love as our souls grow in grace. We must do as well as hear. We must love because we are loved. We must shine because the light has entered our hearts. When we begin to shine with God's love in our hearts, others begin to see the love their souls have been looking for and are drawn to that love like moths to a flame. Not everyone will desire to leave their false loves or their false sense of being loved but for the lost we are called to go.