

## From the Inside Out

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

#### Introduction

Have you seen the Pixar film “Inside Out” or its very creatively named sequel “Inside Out 2?” Cute movies! Both of them.

- The original film follows tells the story of the inner workings of the mind of Riley, a young girl who is forced to adapt to her family's relocation to a different city. Inside of her, five personified emotions direct her thoughts and actions.
- The idea for the film came about as the director, Pete Docter, watched the changes in his daughter's personality as she grew older.
- The whole project was put together with the help of child psychologists and neuroscientists who worked to accurately portray the mind of a growing child.
- The gist of the movie, if you have not seen it, is that ...

Whatever is on the inside – good or bad – is eventually going to show up on the outside.

In essence, you live “inside out.” The movie is not a “Christian movie,” but that message is the same message Jesus conveys in our Gospel text today. Here is how Jesus says it:

Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them. (Mark 7:15)

It's not OUTSIDE IN, but INSIDE OUT.

September is an important month for our congregation. As is true every September, this month will set the parameters for what we can and cannot do in the coming years.

- Now, it is a theological fact that God can do anything He wants. Make sure you understand that clearly.
- And He will do whatever He wants. Make sure you understand that too.
- But September is the month **we tell God** what **we will do** in pursuit of His mission for this church.

To use one of the most terrifying words in all of Christianity, this is Stewardship month.

- This is the month that every person who considers Grace to be their church home is asked to prayerfully consider what God is calling you to do to support the ministries of this church.
  - It all culminates on the last Sunday of this month – a day we call Consecration Sunday – when each of us will be invited to come forward and leave on the altar two commitments.
  - One is the commitment of our Time and Talents. How will we serve God through the ministries of this church? What will we do for Him?
  - The other is our projected financial commitment for the next year. What will we give to Him? That number sets our budget for 2025.

This September is also an important month because it marks our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in this building. You will hear much more about that in the days to come, but even as we worship here today, I'd like you to take a moment to think about this congregation 25 years ago. How many of you were a part of this church 25 years ago?

On the first Sunday in September, those people of Grace were preparing to take a walk. Quite literally to take a walk.

- On the last Sunday of September 1999, several hundred people began their Sunday morning worship service about a mile from here, at 21 E. Harding Road.
- Shortly after the service began, they picked up their things, walked out the door, headed west, walking down Harding Road and walking into this same sanctuary where you and I worship today.
- Why did they do that? Because IN FAITH they were following the call of God. They were walking in Grace.

Our stewardship theme for this month is:

“Walking ON in Grace.”

We are pledging ourselves to continue the journey they began when they walked here.

- Now, in fact it is a journey that began even before that day in September 1999.
- It goes all the way back to October 10, 1915. Almost 109 years ago, when the first worship service was held to form this congregation under the leadership of Pastor Elmer Flack, a seminary student.
  - I know some of you were around in September 1999.
  - I also know that none of you were around in October 1915.
  - But all of you, for as long as you have been here, have been walking with this church. For the last 109 years the people of this congregation have been “Walking on in Grace.” Walking to the place where God has called us.

The same question of faith asked by our spiritual ancestors is the one that is always before us:

Where is God taking us now?

We aren't moving to a new location, but what we see now is not our final destination. God is leading us toward ministries that we will have. Toward the impact we will make. Toward the lives we will touch. Toward the souls who will join the kingdom.

- We aren't done! There is more walking to do!
- So this month we remind ourselves that we are ALWAYS ... WALKING ON IN GRACE! As the people of Grace throughout all time and even today, we strive to be walking in the center of God's Grace.

As I was preparing this message, this thought struck me. In 1999 the walk we will commemorate this month did not start at 21 E. Harding Road. It started in the hearts of

the people who were a part of Grace at that time. IT'S THE INSIDE OUT PRINCIPLE at work!

What happens on the inside will be revealed in what happens on the outside.

The act of walking down Harding Road was an outside response to what was going on in the hearts of the people who made that walk. It's the walk that you see; but the real story the heart that you don't see.

Jesus makes two key observations about the inside out principle in today's text.

### **#1: IF THE HEART IS NOT RIGHT, YOU CAN'T DO THE RIGHT THINGS IN THE RIGHT WAY**

Look at verses 3-4:

The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing ... And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles. (Mark 7:3-4)

The Pharisees were doing all the right things. Their faith laid out all these cleansing rituals and they did them all. Religiously!

- What they did was right and good! The Law given to them by Moses and the traditions developed by the Rabbis required the types of things recorded here.
- Those laws were meant to remind the people that they are sinful people in need of cleansing by God.
- Whether their hands were physically dirty or not, they were spiritually dirty – we all are. Sin has made us filthy. You heard that expressed in the reading in James 1:

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent ...  
(James 1: 21)

Beyond the religious component, we also now know that there are hygienic reasons for doing that too. Your Mom was right! Wash your hands before you come to the table for supper!

In 1818 Dr. I. P. Semmelweis was the first man in history to argue that doctors should wash their hands before examining pregnant women. When he started talking about this one out of every six pregnant women died from what was called "childbirth scourge." After eleven years and the delivery of 8,537 babies, he lost only 184 mothers--about one in fifty. He spent the vigor of his life lecturing and debating with his colleagues.

Once he argued, "I am not asking anything world-shaking. I am asking you only to wash. For God's sake, wash your hands." It was the right thing to do, but no one believed him.

In our text Jesus is not saying "Washing your hands is wrong." Not at all. Instead he says "You are doing it for the wrong reasons."

- You see, the Jews believed that by washing their hands and their faces and their cookware somehow made them acceptable to God. They were working from the OUTSIDE IN.

That approach never works. Ephesians 2 makes that clear to us:

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. (Ephesians 2:8-9, NLT)

## **#2: IF THE HEART IS NOT RIGHT, EVEN THE GOOD THINGS YOU DO AREN'T ALL THAT GOOD.**

Verse 8 reads:

You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions. (Mark 7:8)

In the process of doing good things, the people lost sight of what really mattered. Good things are good, but good things are not necessarily God things.

- It is a good thing for me to mow my grass. My neighbors appreciate it.
- It is a good thing for me to stop at a red light. The other cars in the intersection like that too.
- When we were traveling during my sabbatical this summer, young people stood up and offered me their seats. That was a good thing, I guess. I will be truthful ... it stung a little bit, but they were doing a good thing.

Those good things – as good as they are – never rise above the level of good. They reflect good manners and a good upbringing. They show a good concern for the wellbeing of society. But the heart is still messed up.

Look at what Jesus says:

For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within ... (Mark 7:21-23)

And until the heart is changed, any good thing we do comes from the same dirty heart.

- Did you ever say something nasty and have your father ask "Are you going to kiss your mother with that mouth?"

In a couple of weeks we will read these words in the Epistle of James:

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. (James 3:9-10)

That's why the Psalmist cried out:

Create in me a clean heart, O God ... (Psalm 51:10)

My good isn't really all that good if it comes from an unclean heart.

### **APPLICATION**

Most of you have heard me preach and teach enough that you how much I like a good picture – an image to go by. I think in images.

In my time on staff I have heard others in this community apply several different images to this congregation:

- Some say: "Grace is a serving church." Those people have the heart of a servant.
- Some have said: "Grace is a church that consistently teaches the Bible."
- Some others have said: "If something positive is happening in this community, you can guarantee that Grace is somewhere leading the way."

I like all of those. I like them a lot. And to the extent they are true, I give God the praise. But if you were to ask me what I would love to be the descriptive phrase used by the people who don't attend here, it would be this. More than anything else, I would like people to say:

Grace Church walks with God.

In this month of September, reflecting on where we have been and praying about where we are going, let us "WALK ON IN GRACE."

Amen.