**Mark 7:14-23 August 29, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Mark chapter 7 here re-reading these words. “And he called the people to him again and said to them, ‘Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

One of the worst insults that you can give someone in our world today is to call them “basic”. You are basic, meaning you are, normal, you are just like everyone else. Basic people order a cheeseburger and put ketchup and mustard on it. That’s so basic of you. Basic people wear nice clothes to church, it’s so routine, it’s so by the book, let me guess, after church you may even go to the M-22 and get something basic like eggs and toast, or some basic breakfast meat like bacon or ham or steak. That’s all so basic. Basic is bad because basic is boring. Instead you need to be different and special. You don’t put ketchup and mustard on a cheeseburger you put hot sauce, or a special ketchup that you make yourself that has something crazy and different in it. You don’t wear regular nice clothes to church you wear something flashy, different, special, out of the ordinary, something that will make you stand out. You don’t go out for brunch on a Sunday, you fast, and don’t even eat food on Sundays until the sun goes down. You’re different, You’re you, you aren’t basic and boring and just like everyone else. And in this text, in a way you may not see, Jesus agrees with that state of mind. Jesus agrees with the call to not be basic or normal. Jesus calls for you not to be defiled by what comes out of your heart.

Mark 7 verse 20, “And he said, ‘What comes out of a person is what defiles him.” Jesus uses the Greek word “koinow” or as it is translated here “defile” 5 times in these 9 verses. It’s the whole theme of what he’s talking about, defilement, what defiles you. He’s trying to get them to understand that foods don’t defile a person. As he tells the disciples in verses 18 and 19, “And he said to them, ‘Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach and is expelled? (Thus he declared all foods clean)” How other religions get around this verse and still insist upon forbidding certain foods like pork is to ignore the words of Jesus and instead still stick to the Levitical Law that He fulfilled. It’s thrown back in the face of Christians all the time, the words of Leviticus, the different rules and regulations that were set forth for the Israelites that forbid certain things that seem laughable today, like not eating different foods or wearing different types of clothing, but we miss that those rules have been fulfilled in Christ and therefore no longer apply to our lives, and in this particular case we can point to the words of Jesus himself. To be defiled is usually seen as the same as being corrupted, but they don’t mean the same thing. Think of a banana that you buy from the store. It starts off green, it turns yellow which is really when you should eat it, it’s when it tastes the best, and eventually it turns brown, then even black. I saw a funny picture the other day of 2 bananas that were black, skinny, and shriveled up that someone found on their desk when they returned to work after being gone from the office during the pandemic. That may be our definition of being defiled, it’s a rotting away from good to bad, but that’s not it. Or I should say that’s not all of it.

Defilement really is tied to your identity, it’s tied to what happens in your baptism, and it’s tied to the understanding of “basic” or “normal” or “like everyone else” being an insult and a bad thing. To be defiled is to be made common, it’s to be stripped away of the things that make you special, and unique, and different from those around you. And here Jesus lays out what defiles a person isn’t foods, it’s what flows out of our hearts, as he says in verse 21 – 23, “For from within, out of the heart of man, comes evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” This laundry list of sin is what defiles a person, or in a simplistic way of thinking, strips them of their sacredness, the sacredness that they are given through the waters of Holy Baptism where God makes them holy and sets them apart, washing them clean and adopting them into His family. This moment isn’t basic or normal at all! It sets a person apart, it makes them holy, that’s what it means to be sacred it isn’t like everything else, your special plates and cups that you only use on Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, they are sacred, they aren’t like the plates you use every day. The photos of your loved ones that you don’t have duplicates of are sacred, they are set apart, they are somewhere safe because they are priceless and valuable and different. You are sacred, whether you realize it or not, you are called by God not to be basic as the world is and normal as the world is, but to be holy, to do holy things, to be set apart, to be different and special.

But the world can’t take the fall for the bill of sin that we are responsible for. For Jesus points out that the sins that defile us and make us look like everyone else around us, comes from our hearts. Which makes the advice of “following your heart” utterly ridiculous, your heart isn’t going to help you, your heart is going to lead you into things like theft, murder, adultery, and foolishness. Your heart isn’t your best friend and guide, your heart is a manipulative tool of Satan. But we listen to our heart, rather than God’s Word. We listen to our heart and what we want to do, rather than what God has called us to do. And we are defiled, we are brought down, we are made ordinary, we are robbed of that which makes us special. If you want to be basic and normal in our world today, don’t go to church. Don’t read your Bible. Don’t encourage those in your family or your friends to come with you to worship and grow in their faith. That’s basic. That’s normal. That’s what the world around you is used to doing. And we fall right into the same rut. If you want to be counter culture, if you want to be different, if you want to be special, make church a priority. Make your faith a priority. Feed your faith regularly. That’s different from the world around you, that will make your family and friends and neighbors scratch their heads and call you anything but basic and normal in the eyes of the world. That will make them wonder why you are so different.

And the answer to why you are so different is because God has made you different. He has regenerated you from the defilement of sin. He has washed you free from sin. You have a definitive moment you can point to where you went from basic and sinful to sacred and holy, and that’s your baptism. If you want to be different remember your baptism birthday and celebrate it as if it were a greater day than the day you were born. Because through Baptism you were given more than a candle and a cloth, you were given more than a certificate and a banner. You were given more than a piece of cake and some nice pictures as a milestone in your life. You were given the identity of being God’s own child. You are His. He loves you. He protects you. He defends you. He equips you, with what Paul describes in our Epistle lesson, with the whole armor of God. As Paul writes in Ephesians 6:13, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.” This armor isn’t normal, basic, ordinary, boring, this is spectacular, special, and powerful. And it’s yours. Given to you, put on you, to protect you in this evil day. When your very own heart seeks to defile you, but you have something greater on your side. You have God your heavenly Father who provides for you. You have Jesus Your Savior who died to save you and forgives you all your sins. You have the Holy Spirit to be your guide, the faith that He created to receive the gifts that God gives you. You have it all.

One day while I was teaching Confirmation class we were talking about being special. This teenage girl raised her hand and said, “Pastor, I don’t like how everyone today is told that they are special. Not everyone is special because if everyone is special then that means that no one is special.” And I thought about what she said, and how to respond with more than just the usual question in Confirmation Class which is, “Why are you asking this or what made you say this?” And I looked at her and said. “It’s true, all of us can’t possibly be special in the same way, we aren’t all special as Olympic athletes are special and can do things we can’t do, but when we talk about being special in the way that she was describing, we’re talking about being special to someone, and the fact is, you are special to your parents who love you, and you are special to God who made you his child.”

My dear friends in Christ, do not be deceived. Do not be defiled. You are special to God. He made you special. He equipped you with his very own armor to fend off the evil one. He formed you, He knows you and He loves you. He has called for you to be more than basic, and normal in the eyes of the world, He has not called for you to blend in with everyone around you and act the same, look the same, do the same things and sound the same way. You are different, and it’s a good thing. God be praised.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.