

**15 Pentecost B**

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9  
Psalm 15  
James 1:17-27  
Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

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Grace and peace to you from Christ Jesus. Amen.

Have you ever had one of those moments when someone said something that stopped you in your tracks? Especially if it comes from someone you don't expect – a good example is perhaps a child. Just for fun I found few examples:

From a 4 yr old: You might be scared, but sometimes being scared is worth it.

From a 7 yr old: When a mother asked how her outfit looked their child said "Momma, how does it make you feel?"

From a 3 yr old: It's ok if my friends aren't kind to me. I can show them how.

From a young girl named Ebony: How are we supposed to meet new people if we can't talk to strangers?

What is so intriguing about statements like these is that they turn our expectations on their head; there is an obvious and profound truth contained therein.

Well, we might think it's cute when such statements come from children, it was quite another thing however, when this kind saying came from Jesus.

Everyone knew or was familiar with the expectations set out in the Jewish Law (for example we heard today about hand washing.) Jesus himself would have known these rules well. But if you read through the Gospels you will find that Jesus seemed to be continually breaking or disrespecting these rules. And that was very confusing for people. The Law was meant to bring order and groundedness to the whole of society. Think of the 10 Commandments: to say "don't steal" or "don't kill" is a pretty

good place to start building a foundation for the community. The 10 Commandments brought order.

We have rules too. For example, if you drive you know the “rules of the road” that are intended to keep everyone safe (mostly) and able to get where we need to go. When someone breaks those rules, there are consequences, you might get in an accident, you might get a fine or worse. So, breaking them seems like a bad idea.

But rules can also be constricting or perhaps even pointless in certain circumstances. So, an ambulance or fire truck or police will speed when it’s necessary for them to do so. I am sure, if you are a driver, that you have at some point sat at a red light in the middle of nowhere, or late at night without another car in sight? We might obey that red light out of habit or fear, or we might break the law and cautiously move out and get on our way.

In Jesus’ confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus is boldly moving beyond the Law where it had become stale and no longer serving to benefit everyone. Like those head-turning-unexpected-statements from children, no one expected the carpenter from Nazareth to i) have anything awesome to say, ii) to challenge the long-established establishment of power. And he did both of those things because some of the laws had become corrupted.

As humans we are predisposed not just to seek power, but to corrupt it. Politicians moving up the ranks, CEO’s of rich corporations, police officers high on authority, clergy abusing privilege are all familiar examples today. It started a long time ago; God’s 10 Commandments became a multitude of rules, which became a prescription for control through fear and manipulation. Hence, as we heard – if you don’t wash your hands before eating you eat with defiled hands. A rule which Jesus turns on its head.

Essentially, what Jesus does is to liberate them all. The people that day are set free, emancipated from following rules for the sake of rules and set on a new path of truth. And what's really interesting is that he also completely flips over the power structure. It's not like he took the religious and powerful leaders aside and offered them a seminar so that they could update their leadership skills. No, instead he teaches the whole crowd, giving each person the ability and responsibility to discern what goes in, and as he said, more importantly, what comes out. To build community it takes a community! Jesus helped them to embrace a love for God and neighbour as themselves.

When I think of this story and of the church today, I believe we are coming out of another long period in history in which power has been concentrated and at times abused. We're learning that it's more important that someone is here on a Sunday morning than it is how they are dressed (I remember as a child everyone wore their "Sunday best.") We're learning that ministers are far from perfect, and don't have all the answers, in fact we're not even "closer" to God as some people like to say! We're understanding that brokenness doesn't keep us from God. We're growing in the whole body claiming responsibility for ministry. Last week in one of the committee meetings I was moved to hear lay people (just like you!) offering insightful reflections on the Bible. The power, by which we are learning to live, is that of the Holy Spirit.

That Spirit enables us to love ourselves and one another. It sets us free from doctrines and policies in order that we might simply listen for what is good and true and right. We are emancipated from worry about doing the wrong thing or being bloated in pride when we do the right thing. We are called to just try to do our best.

It makes no difference how educated you are, what your age is, who you know, what you do for a living, what school you

attend, how many followers you have on social media, whether you wear a collar or not. We are all beloved disciples and part of a holy family. We all hold the power of the Holy Spirit within us, because God put it there. We all share the work of ministry by the commission of baptism. We welcome all, because we ourselves have been welcomed. Thanks be to God! Amen.