

WASHED UP BEFORE DINNER**Luke 11:37-44****(Read Luke 11:37-44)**

Intro: I think our dishwasher home is a Luke 11 dishwasher. All the money we paid for it and it still does not get our glasses clean. After running a load, I will open it up and all the plates are clean and the silverware is reasonably clean and the coffee cups are clean and the bowls are clean, but, more often than not, the glasses are all sparkly and clean on the outside but there is baked on debris stuck on the inside. It's frustrating. And gross if, somehow, one slips by the inspection process and you are finishing up a refreshing glass of water when you spy a globule of unknown origin in what you just drank. Yuck!

These glasses are like the Pharisees Jesus is confronting, they're clean on the outside and dirty on the inside. Yes, Jesus has a word for the Pharisees again today. Here in this last lesson from the dinner table from the Gospel of Luke, religious leaders are taking a serious tongue-lashing from Jesus. He's really had it by now. He is very frustrated that after all of his patient teaching they just don't get it. And they really should have. They knew scripture better than anyone. But they didn't.

And the feeling is mutual. They are very frustrated with Jesus too. He's threatening their very existence with his teaching, so they hope to catch him in an error. They watch his every move. But in this particular instance he made it too easy for them. Any man of God knew that you were supposed to wash your hands before eating! In fact, the particularly holy ones washed their hands between each course. But they were aghast that this rabbi, who paraded around calling himself the Son of God, just pulled up to the table and began chowing down. Oh the horror! Actually they were happy – they'd caught him red handed! Or at least dirty handed.

But, actually, this ceremonial hand washing had had nothing to do with hygiene. Instead it was a practice the Pharisees had come up with to remove the moral uncleanness that came from contact with unholy people and things – like Gentiles, women, and animals. Commentator Donald Miller points out that it had nothing to do with hygiene, instead it had everything to do with religious arrogance. It had not been handed down with Mosaic Law but had been conjured up by the religious elite as a way of staying ahead of the crowd.

But Jesus called them out as he responds with, “You're worried about me washing my hands before I eat? You folks are all washed up and you haven't even had dinner yet.” Their astonishment with his so-called law breaking revealed their shallow grasp of reality. Jesus uses the opportunity for a teachable moment as he points out . . .

Official piety is not the same as internal purity

- Listen to his tough words again, . . . *you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.* Luke 11:39
- It's a graphic picture, “You're all clean on the outside – but you're crusty on the inside”. This calls for another dishwashing illustration. Say you had guacamole at your Super Bowl party last Sunday night. It was awesome! The best you'd ever made with just the right amount of onion, tomato, cilantro, cumin and all the other things that make it perfect. Everyone loved it and the bowl was scraped almost clean by the last person using the last chip. In fact the bowl was so perfectly cleaned out that it didn't even need to be washed – so you just put it away. It's clean, right? The outside looks fine – the inside was scraped out – that's okay isn't it? NOPE! No chip known to man could ever clean out all vestiges of guacamole. In fact, any vestige left would be concrete crud by the next time you went to use that bowl. The outside might look fine, but the inside is a different story.
- Arrogance made the Pharisees think they were fine with all their external piety while, in actuality, their hearts were full of putrefying hypocrisy that blinded them to what true holiness is. Their brand of holiness concerned with outward appearances that betrayed an inward selfishness.
- Jesus tells them to get out of themselves and open their eyes to the hurting and lost around them. Those Gentiles and unclean masses that make them want to wash their hands are the loved and coveted children of a compassionate Heavenly Father. So instead worrying about how clean your fingers are . . .

Don't be greedy – instead serve the needy

- I know that sounds hokey and like something you'd read on a bumper sticker, but Jesus is pointing out that no matter what your outward appearance might be, what goes on in your heart is what really reveals whom you are serving. Religious ceremony is important but what is more important is caring for our neighbors.

- The Pharisees lived by the Ten Commandments and they'd fashioned all kinds of additional regulations to stay on the straight and narrow. Those additions were what had moved them more and more to cold external religion and away from the heartfelt relationship with a loving God. Besides, while the Ten Commandment are timeless reminders of how to relate to God and to one another, the Greatest Commandment according to Jesus was summed up in *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself*. Luke 10:27. Notice – there is no handwashing or handwringing involved. Just love God and love people.
- So, let's all ask ourselves . . .

What's happening in my heart?

- What is God doing in your heart? What are you bringing to him in offering?
- Are you doing it for the appearance? How about what you give to God? Jesus confronted the Pharisee's with *But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others*. Luke 11:42. They are making sure they are bringing in a tithe – that's required in the law, but, it's not because of love for God or for the needy – it's because the law says it. Jesus says, "YES – you should give and it's good you do, but it also needs to come from the heart with a heart of love."
- Jesus brings another woe. Listen, *Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces*. Luke 11:43. This was real issue for Jesus, so it needs to be for his followers too. Several weeks we looked at a passage in Luke 14 where Jesus nailed the religious leaders for clawing their way to prominence and here he's pointing it out again. It's the whole idea of pride that displaces compassion and care. It's a human failing – we all like applause and pats on the back and accolades. And they're good – until they're not. They're good until they make us so large we blot out the Lord. It's that problem with outward appearances again – where we get larger than life and our heart shrinks accordingly. But a Christ Follower with a heart that is full of the love of Jesus will not be too full of him or herself.
- And one more woe from our text, *Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it*. Luke 11:44. This takes some explanation. David Guzik explains it this way, "These religious leaders loved giving the impression that they were ever so spiritual, but they actually defiled everyone they came in contact with. Walking over a grave ceremonially defiled a Jewish person, even if they didn't know it was there. According to Numbers 19:16, everyone who touched a grave was ceremonially unclean for seven days. For this reason, the Jews sought to mark graves clearly, usually using whitewash, so everyone would know where they were and would avoid them." (End Quote) Now, think about what Jesus is actually saying to these people who think they are so ceremonially pure. They are so concerned with his lack of handwashing and all the while they were, themselves, rotting corpses. This is how Peterson renders verse 44, *Frauds! You're just like unmarked graves: People walk over that nice, grassy surface, never suspecting the rot and corruption that is six feet under*. Luke 11:44 (The Message).

Conclusion: How is your heart? Is it clean? I'm not concerned about how shiny and bright you are on the outside – it's your heart that is what really matters. I've been watching with great interest and anticipation what has been happening at Asbury University over the past 10 days. It is a move of the Spirit of God. I'm so glad it's happening there. But it can happen anywhere. That is why all week long I have been praying for a revival in my own spirit. How's your heart? How's your spirit?

The hymn writer asks,

Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?

Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour?

Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

Are you? Are you really? Or are you washed up and washed out like those cold Pharisees who were more worried about Jesus's dirty hands than people who needed compassion just outside their door.

How is your heart? Let's spend some time in prayer. Amen.