



Introduction

Jesus protests against human customs being given the weight of divine law, while the essence of God's law is ignored. True uncleanness comes not from external things, but from the intentions of the human heart. Last week Jesus told us "the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63). Now James says God has given us birth by the word of truth. We who were washed in the word when we were born in the font return to it every Sunday to ask God to create in us clean hearts.

Confession and Forgiveness

In the name of the Father, and of the ✚ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone.

Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and one another.

Most merciful God,

we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.

We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart;

we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

Forgive us, renew us, and lead us,

so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved.

In the name of ✚ Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.

Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith. **Amen**

Opening Hymn ELW # 520/LBW # 248

Dearest Jesus, at Your Word

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

O God our strength, without you we are weak and wayward creatures. Protect us from all dangers that attack us from the outside, and cleanse us from all evil that arises from within ourselves, that we may be preserved through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

The Israelites believed the law was a divine gift that provided guidelines for living out the covenant. Moses commands the people to obey the law and to neither add to nor subtract from it. The Israelites are also to teach the law to their children and their children's children.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Psalm: Psalm 15

¹LORD, who may dwell in your tabernacle?

Who may abide upon your holy hill?

²**Those who lead a blameless life and do what is right,
who speak the truth from their heart;**

³they do not slander with the tongue, they do no evil to their friends;
they do not cast discredit upon a neighbor.

⁴**In their sight the wicked are rejected,
but they honor those who fear the LORD.**

They have sworn upon their health and do not take back their word.

⁵They do not give their money in hope of gain,
nor do they take bribes against the innocent.

Those who do these things shall never be overthrown.

Second Reading: James 1:17-27

The letter of James was intended to provide first-century Christians with instruction in godly behavior. Here Christians are encouraged to listen carefully and to act on what they hear, especially by caring for those least able to care for themselves.

Read the complete text [here](#).

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

Mark's gospel depicts Jesus as challenging traditional ways in which religious people determine what is pure or impure. For Jesus, the observance of religious practices cannot become a substitute for godly words or deeds that spring from a faithful heart.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

I am weary. Heartsick. And from my recent conversations with others, I know many of you are too. There are so many things weighing on us.

We grow restless and rebellious under the reinforced restrictions that are needed to slow and stop the current surge in the Covid pandemic. We feel helpless to protect the children and others most vulnerable.

We are appalled by the situation in Afghanistan and by the death and destruction in Haiti; we are overwhelmed by the severity of heat and drought plus wildfires and floods in various parts of our country.

Some days it seems to me that the world is simply spinning out of control. As if it will just completely fall apart.

Those days I do not need someone to blame for all those problems. Instead, I need a reminder that the future of the world is not in human hands. The future of humanity and all of creation are in God's control. And that God is, as so many passages from scripture say, "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." (Psalm 145:8, plus others)

At first glance, today's gospel text does not bring me much comfort. In this passage, the leaders of the temple in Jerusalem have confronted Jesus because he and his followers are not meeting their expectations. They are not following all of the traditions of the elders.

That may not seem like such scandalous behavior to us, but like those leaders we may find it easy to place blame on others for the way things are unfolding in the world around us.

Notice that Jesus doesn't reproach the usual suspects – the ones we hear named other places in scripture as “the sinners and tax collectors.” Jesus reproaches the temple leaders themselves. Those who should know better, because they are supposed to know and follow the commandments of God, not just the traditions the people have been following.

Jesus goes on to explain – really to remind them of what they should already know – that there is nothing we consume that defiles us; makes us unclean; or harms us as much as what comes out of us. It is what comes from inside us; from our hearts and minds that harms us and hurts others as well.

This is a hard lesson to hear. A difficult teaching to bear; perhaps even more so than the difficult teaching we read last week in John's gospel.

When we feel hurt by everything that is going wrong around us, it is oh-so difficult for us to feel like we have any responsibility. That too, is part of the human problem.

We truly may not have control of many things that happen around us, but we fall into the trap of blaming others. Of hating others who do not think or act like we do. Of not caring about the well-being of others, especially those who live far away or look different; speak another language or act in ways that we don't understand.

The evil things that we think or do as a result defile and corrupt us – and hurt others and may cause them to react in a way that harms us.

Of course, Jesus does not tell us that we can solve all the problems of the world. Not in this passage or in any other place. But Jesus does tell those who will listen that we need to place our trust in God.

We need to worship with our whole hearts. We need to seek the truth in scripture. We need to pray for guidance. We need to live in faith and hope. We need to let love for God and for one another guide our every word and action.

Our hearts need healing from the inside out. Healing that only God can provide. That healing and hope will help us to care about and care for others in the ways that will please God.

As our text from James says, every good gift comes to us from God, the Father of light. Let us each seek that light; the comfort, strength, and guidance that God wants to share with us, so that we can live in the light and the love that God wills for us, for the sake of our own hearts, but most of all, for the sake of others who still need to experience God's love. Amen

Hymn of the Day ELW # 818/LBW # 492 *O Master, Let Me Walk with You*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Apostles' Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Made children and heirs of God's promise, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

We pray for the church, that it is a safe haven for all who seek your presence. Fill it with pastors, deacons, and leaders who echo your expansive and generous welcome.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the whole of creation, that plants and animals have the habitat and resources to thrive and flourish. Inspire us to protect threatened habitats and ensure a sustainable future for generations to come. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for individuals in positions of authority. Raise up wise and discerning leaders in federal, state, and local governments and guide them to seek the benefit of every person. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are in need. Support and encourage those who are unemployed, underemployed, or experiencing poverty. Bring food, shelter, clothes, and stability for daily life. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for this congregation, especially those beginning a new school year (as *students, teachers, or school staff*). Empower teachers and school administrators. Guide students in their learning and development. Provide safety to all. Accompany parents, foster parents, grandparents, and caregivers who provide encouragement and love. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We give thanks for the faithful departed who showed us how to honor God with our heart. Inspire us by their example and renew our faith, trusting that we will be united with them in glory. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those in our hearts known only to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

Closing Hymn ELW # 873/LBW # 553

Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart!

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ruth Ann Sipe.