

©All Rights Reserved

9/2/2012 First Presbyterian Church of Allegan.

Guided Meditation. Eat it up.

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

Beginning with verses 1-8

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus ² and noticed that some of his disciples were eating the loaves with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³ (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they ceremonially wash their hands, thus maintaining the tradition of the elders. ⁴ They do not eat anything from the marketplace unless it is purified by washing. And there are many other customs that they have received as tradition to keep, like the washing of cups, pots, copper bowls, and dining couches.) ⁵ And the Pharisees and scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with defiled hands?” ⁶ And he said to them, “Isaiah prophesied accurately about you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. ⁷ In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ ⁸ Neglecting the command of God, you maintain the tradition of men.”

©All Rights Reserved
Skipping down to verses 14 - 15

¹⁴ Calling the crowd to him again, he said to them, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand. ¹⁵ There is nothing from outside a man that enters him that is able to defile him. Rather the things that come out of a man are the things that defile him.”

Ending with verses 21- 23

For from within, from the heart of a person, come evil plots, immoralities, thefts, murders, ²² adulteries, greedy actions, wicked deeds, deceit, sensuality, selfishness, slander, arrogance, lack of moral sense. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

A guided meditation is much like a prayer, except that it uses your imagination in order to think about things in a symbolic way. So at this time, I would like to invite you to get comfortable in your pews, and to close your eyes.... Quiet your restless thoughts... one by one, set them aside as they come to distract you...open your heart to God, just as you do when you pray...be aware of your breathing... how it goes in and out... and if you can... feel your heart beat... and listen to it for a little bit...

©All Rights Reserved

And now simply imagine yourself inside of your house, standing next to the doorway. Everything is cleaned and ready for company, and your hand is on the doorknob because cars are pulling into your driveway. All of your friends and your family are here! It has been so long since you have seen them! All of the people that you love so dearly have come today to celebrate with you! You know all of their faces, so familiar and so dear, and as they come laughing and smiling into your house there are many hugs and arms full of gifts and bags and containers. And with the shuffling of shoes and the plunking down items on every open space on the table and the counter, the celebration that you have planned to have together begins with a hustle and bustle of people pulling their dishes to share out of brown paper bags... and the popping open of Tupperware containers.... as your bowls are pulled down from cabinets and serving spoons are recruited into service as they are jammed into mounds of food. And as you turn to work and hurry to organize things and talk to people and locate items and answer questions, something suddenly stops you short. Something is terribly wrong. As you had turned back from the counter, you suddenly got a whiff from a bowl. And there is something that is inside of that bowl that smells terrible and rotten. Looking intently at it you see that it was just a nice green salad, but as you stare closely into the bowl with the little blue

©All Rights Reserved

flowers that is clutched tightly to a woman's chest, you see that a steady drip of jealousy is dropping out of her heart, and that it is wafting down to settle and hide itself among the leaves in the bowl like a cloud of green slime. You almost ask her if the salad is spoiled, but you stop yourself as you lift your eyes to her face and you see the problem. It is apparent. She is not looking at you, but is looking across the room toward that person that she has always envied, that individual that she has repeatedly put down as much as possible. Not knowing exactly what to do, but concerned about serving a salad that smells like that, you casually pluck a leaf from the bowl in her hands and after shaking it gently, you put it in your mouth. Even though the smell from the jealousy still lingers in the air above the bowl, and even though that smell still turns your stomach, the lettuce leaf itself tastes fine, and it crunches exactly like it usually does. You can tell that the lettuce has been washed in her salad spinner, exactly as she usually does, and there is no reason to put the blame on a salad that is perfectly healthy and wholesome. It is the rotten smell of jealousy that you are now worried about. Do the others smell it too?

"Can I take that?" You ask her gently as her eyes are busy with her thoughts. She nods distractedly and you take the bowl to the table hoping that the terrible smell of jealousy will dissipate. But it stubbornly lingers on

©All Rights Reserved

the edge of the dish, tickling the edge of your perception as you place it on the dinner table.

Soon the rest of the dishes follow this first one. There are the mashed potatoes, served in their traditional bowl set in their traditional place. There is the meat, cooked to perfection, sitting there in all of its glory. The jello and the green bean casserole, the rolls and the fruit all are heaped in their bowls each in their proper places.

As you settle into your seat you notice that the table itself looks wonderful. All of the plates are perfectly set, with their glasses and napkins properly in their places. The centerpiece is lovely, the silverware glints in the light and all of the traditional pieces of Grandma's china are all in their proper places. All of your guests are smiling and joking and as your eyes apprehensively move to the salad with its terrible dressing of jealousy, you stop breathing for a second as you notice that there is also something wrong with the mashed potatoes. They are in the wrong bowl. From around the edges of the beautiful cream colored gilded bowl, a curl of selfishness makes its way from the gilded bowl and it is connected like a spider's thread to the heart of its owner. The thread smells cloyingly sweet and sticky, a scent that clashes with the earthy and creamy goodness of the

©All Rights Reserved

mashed potatoes. And as you watch horrified, the thread grows thicker and stronger, wrapping itself around the antique bowl with a frightening possessiveness.

With newly opened eyes you begin to see terrible threads coming from the hearts of all of your guests. Here is a thread of arrogance, spreading itself out wide and trying to outdo itself above all of the others. It smells like cheap cologne and bad perfume combined. And there, directly across from you is someone with a thread of deceit, coming directly from their heart. It almost sizzles with the stench of badly burned meat as it slowly creeps across the table and grabs onto the bottom of the gravy server.

As you look into the eyes of all of your beloved family members and guests, you realize that there are no problems with the food that they brought to share at your table, the problem is not with the good ingredients that God has so bountifully provided to sustain all of your bodies and replenish your energy. The problems that you smell that fill the air and compete against each other in the room have been brought into this gathering in the **hearts of your guests**. And as these heart threads weave around and clash with each other, the beauty of the lovely meal is

©All Rights Reserved

destroyed with flashes of the eyes and curt comments and “jokes” that are much more hurtful than funny.

And as you are sitting there watching everyone eat food together, despite the terrible conflicting smells coming from all of their heart threads all along the table, you are dismayed as you look down and you see a thread curling out of your own heart. It is a small thread, but determined, it is a completely black thread of fear that hesitantly, but steadily, grows longer and bigger, trying to push you away from the table and insisting that you run away from all of these horrifying people .

But just as you are about to push back your chair and flee from your awful guests at your celebration dinner, you look up and see a new face at the table.

The guest that you routinely invite but most frequently ignore has risen to his feet. His face radiates love and acceptance and kindness. His hands gently hold a loaf of bread. You rapidly examine him closely. Of all of the guests at the table, he does not have a thread. There is no vile smell of decay or rot that comes from him, but simply the clean freshness from after a rain and the wholesome smell of divine love and forgiveness. All eyes at the table turn to him now as he stands there with his eyes brimming

©All Rights Reserved

with tears. All voices are silenced and the mocking laughter shrivels up and dies away. He lifts up a loaf of freshly baked bread. The smell coming off of it's golden crust makes your mouth water and reminds you that you are indeed very hungry. "This is my body which is broken for you." He says as he breaks apart the loaf and pure love fills the room with its essence. "Take it, and eat it, all of you. And do this in remembrance of me." Everyone's faces are bowed in humility. There is hardly a breath as this man, Jesus, takes the fragrant loaf of bread passes it around the table. As the hands of your guests reverently reach for the bread, and as they break off a piece of the loaf, the vile threads from their hearts snap and pull back from their grips on the dishes on the table. As they eat the bread, the threads from their hearts disintegrate into the wonderful smell of pure love.

There is a calm silence in the room when everyone has eaten the loaf. Mysteriously there is still plenty left for even more people to eat. And then Jesus picks up his glass and pitcher from the table. As he pours out the dark wine he says, "This cup is the new covenant, sealed in my blood. As often as you drink of it, do this in remembrance of me." As Jesus pours out cups of wine all around the table, we all drink together and there is a new spirit in the room. It is the spirit of love and community. It is the spirit of acceptance, forgiveness and grace. You look down and notice your own

©All Rights Reserved

dark heart thread of fear has disappeared as you laugh with your friends and your relatives. Now you understand. It doesn't matter that what the table is set with. It doesn't matter that if traditional foods are here or not. It doesn't matter which fork people use or what people eat or drink or what they wear, all that really matters about people is the state of their hearts. What matters is what comes out of our hearts and how we connect God with others and ourselves.

As the dinner celebration ends and the last of the desserts are cleared away, you find yourself satisfied and content. The love of Christ has broken the threads that bind people to their sins. May every dinner be a celebration of love that does the same.

Our time of meditation is now complete. As we wind up our imaginations and bring our thoughts back to this time and place, I would like to ask if there are any reflections on our guided meditation today.