

22 August 2021  
Pentecost 13 with Adult Confirmation

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Word that Gives Us Jesus”

Text: Mark 7:1-13; Ephesians 5:22-33

**G**race, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Pharisees were one of the groups that formed in Judaism during what is called the *Intertestamental Period* - the approximately 400 years between the end of the prophetic career of Malachi at the end of the Old Testament, and the arrival of John the Baptist at the beginning of the New. And with the rise of these groups, Judaism changed. The Judaism of Jesus' day was quite different than what we read of in the Scriptures - in the time of Moses, the Judges, and the Kings. Many of their teachings, rules, laws - their *traditions* - are not found in the pages of Scripture. They evolved and grew during this Intertestamental time, along with and under the tutelage of these groups like the Pharisees.

Now, to be charitable, most were, I'm sure, well-intentioned . . . though a few could be considered questionable. But this is why Jesus sparred so often with the Pharisees, like what we heard in the Holy Gospel today. They were insisting their traditions be regarded and followed *as the Law of God*. What they said was it. But Jesus knew better. These were not in God's Law; not in the Scriptures. And while some may have been good and helpful, others were not. Others, in fact, contradicted and went against the clear Word of God. And anything that goes against the Word of God - however well-intentioned, however wise-sounding, however impressive, however seemingly-enlightened - has got to go.

But it didn't just happen in Jesus' day. The same thing happened in the time leading up to the Reformation. Groups were forming within the church and from them changes in teachings, in traditions, and in the liturgy had crept in. Things were evolving. Most, I'm sure, well-intentioned, and some, I'm sure, helpful. But others were not. Others went against the Word of God. And anything that went against the Word of God had to go.

And you could say the same thing has been happening in the church in our day and age. Though today with our technology the changes happen at a much faster pace! But it is not hard to see how some churches have changed their teachings on a whole host of issues - things that were spoken against in the past are now considered okay; and in some cases not just okay, but good, right, and salutary. But we should not just accept these changes uncritically. Some may be good, but some may not. Some may be against the Word of

God. And for those, however well-intentioned, however wise-sounding, however impressive, however seemingly-enlightened - anything that is against the Word of God has got to go. Sadly, though, some churches have held onto such teachings and insisted that not these new teachings but the Word of God has to go.

In the Holy Gospel we heard today, the issue Jesus faced was two-fold: first, it was the Pharisees insisting on their tradition of washings - which, really, isn't bad. Washing is good, right? During the pandemic we were told repeatedly to wash our hands. The problem was the Pharisees were teaching that these washings were commands and doctrines given by God when they weren't. So they were speaking where God had not spoken, misrepresenting the Word of God. Which, if you can do with something not so vital, like washing, you can do with things much more important - like the commandments. Which, in fact, is what Jesus points to next. For the Pharisees also had a tradition - called *Corban* - which ***prohibited them from doing anything for their father or mother***. A clear violation, as Jesus points out, of the Fourth Commandment, which commands us to *honor, serve, obey, love, and cherish our parents*. A commandment, by the way, you never outgrow. So as Jesus pointed out, their tradition was actually not just contradicting but trumping the Word of God.

In our day and age, one of the new teachings or traditions that has overtaken the Word of God - not just in the world but also in some churches - is with regard to what we heard about today in the Epistle - **marriage**. Now, I'm not going to pick on any one group today - you all know what has happened to marriage in recent years. And to preach just against them would just make all of you smug and self-righteous. And that's no good either. Because the reality is that the problems in our world, society, and church go back *much farther* than just recent history and recent changes and re-definitions and is a reason of US to repent. Yeah, us. That we have not taught about nor upheld marriage as we should.

That the God-given roles of husbands and wives are good and something we should strive to live by.

That sexuality is reserved for the marriage of one man and one woman and was designed for the procreation of children.

But do we wink at those who violate this? And at sexuality run rampant in our world today and infecting just about everything? Have we even bought into it? Do we turn a blind eye to the pandemic of folks choosing to "live together" without being married? Have we thrown up our hands at divorce and said: *Oh well!* Do we choose not to address the issue of pornography because, well, boys will be boys? Do we encourage our children to marry and have children - *in that order*? And that that's good to do so? Do we regard children as a gift and blessing from the Lord? Or has medical technology made procreation so clinical that we think the where, when, why, what, who, and how of

children is in *our* control? And I could go on and on . . .

The problem with all this - whether it is what happened with the Pharisees, or at the time of the Reformation, or today - isn't just a matter of rules and laws and morals. It is far more important than that. **It is that Jesus gets lost.** The Commandments were given NOT to make us good, because they can't do that. The Commandments were given to enable us to see that we're NOT good, **and that we need Jesus.** We need His forgiveness and His life and His salvation. We need Him to bear our sin for us on the cross. If we think we're not so bad and that those things God calls sins really aren't sins at all, then there's no need to repent, no need for forgiveness, no need for Jesus. And that's NOT a good place to be! Because on the Last Day, without Jesus, you're facing a dismal future. And that's putting it lightly.

So the pure Word of God is important because Jesus is important. As you've heard me say, the Bible is not a rule book, it's a Jesus book. From beginning to end, it's all about Him.

Even these verses about marriage we heard from Paul today - for did you hear what He said there? Right in the middle of all this talk about husbands and wives he says, ***This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*** He was really talking first and foremost about Jesus! Christ as the perfect, loving Bridegroom, and the Church as His Bride. This is the way Christ cares for His Bride. This is the way church submits to Christ's headship. And God wants to bless our marriages in the same way. This isn't a rule to follow to make God like you! It's a reality for God to bless you!

And so to change or ignore or disregard the Word of God - in this or any other way - is not just a matter of rules, and who's good and who's not. It is to miss out on the blessing God has for us in Christ Jesus. A blessing we want, and as the church want all people to have.

So the call to repentance is a call not to condemn, but to receive - to receive the forgiveness, life, blessing, and salvation of Jesus that He won for you on the cross. Because that is what we need. And that is what Jesus wants to give. To all people. Whoever they are, however they live.

That's why catechesis is so important for the church. To know the Word of God that gives us life. To know that Word *made flesh* and all that He has done for us. To know what God has said, so that when the world or even the church says something different, we'll know something's not right. That with this false teaching, Jesus is being taken away from us.

So we have catechesis for the sake of Jesus; to give us Jesus. And in catechesis, we actually read the Word of God and discuss it. And then see how that word is reflected in

the Catechism. And then see how that Word is lived in the liturgy. And then see how we take the gifts given to us by Jesus in the liturgy out with us into the world to live them and give them to others. It's all about the Word of God and Jesus.

And that Word of God tells us not only about who Jesus is and all that He has done for us, but also who we are. And that's something SO important today. To know who you are. Your identity has become a BIG issue in the world. People claim certain identities. Certain identities are considered good and others bad. People try to steal your identity. But what the Word of God tells us is that **your identity is a gift**. It is something given to you. By the one who created you, the one who redeemed you, and the one who wants you as His own. And that your identity is not what the world says it is or what you say it is, but what God says it is. And He says: **you are a baptized child of God**, you are mine, your sins are forgiven, and you are an heir of heaven. And that identity trumps all others. Because that identity is eternal.

But that's something we have to learn. So we catechize. We read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Word of God. And we rejoice in this gift and in being a child of God. That's why today is a day of joy as Audra, Barbara, and Joe come up here and confess the Word of God and say that even if threatened with death, THIS is who they ARE. That the life and forgiveness Jesus gives no one can take away. Those are big words. Too big, if they were ours. But not too big for Jesus. Who backed them up with His resurrection from the dead. Who promised to be with us and strengthen us and provide for us and come back again for us, to take us home. And He will. So we can be confident and sure.

And confident and sure in this too: that today is just a beginning. Confirmation is not an ending. Satan is going to step up his attacks and assaults against Audra, Barbara, and Joe, and will continue to hound and harass us. The world isn't going to stop its opposition to the Word of God, and even our own sinful flesh is going to try to pull us away and drag us down into sin. The Word of God tells us all that, too. Life isn't going to be easy.

So today is a beginning. The beginning of Audra, Barbara, and Joe receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus with us, continuing to receive the forgiveness of their sins, and being strengthened with this food. They'll need it as badly as the rest of us. The Bridegroom here caring for His Bride and giving us all we need. And directing our eyes not just to the cross and what Jesus provided for us there, but also through the cross and empty tomb to the life that never ends.

And if you think about it, that means we're really in a kind of in-between time as well. Not an Intertestamental time, but the time between Jesus' ascension and His coming again in glory. And in this time, this in-between time, traditions have come and gone, there have been plenty of false teachings and there will be plenty more. But what doesn't change in the Word of God. So to that we cling. In that we rejoice. And we rejoice most of all that even when we fail and fall, that Jesus clings to His Bride, to us, with His

forgiveness. And He will not stop. He will not let you go. He loves you too much.

So Audra, Barbara, and Joe, we rejoice in the Word you have received, the forgiveness you have received, and the life you have received, and that you will continue to receive here with us. We rejoice that God has brought you here. You are a blessing to us, as we will strive to be a blessing to you. Call us to repentance when we need, and we'll do the same. Forgive us, pray for us, and expect the same from us. And rejoice with us in the faithfulness of God as He builds His Church and leads us, His Bride, home.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.