

Gospel Reflection

Matthew 15:10-20, 21-28

*The Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost*

By Laura Orcutt, worship leader

What I am fascinated with is the first part of the Gospel reading for today. The passage has Jesus rebuking the audience of Jewish people for focusing on the wrong thing. One can get obsessed with ensuring all the rules of the Jewish faith are followed, remaining Kosher. Now remember Jesus is Kosher. He believes in following the rules of his faith, but he wants them to get at the heart of the matter, literally. His concern is not what goes into the mouth, as that will pass through the body. That is a matter of diet and that which is consumed will pass through. Jesus is concerned with what comes out of the mouth. For what springs from the mouth, springs from the heart. What springs from the heart is from what is put into the heart, perhaps not quite literally. But understand, from what is planted in the heart will bear fruit, shown by what comes out of the mouth. He states the bad, the ugly... "evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, and slander." This is what defiles. But what is he really saying? What are the hidden words behind the harsh words spoken? I think here in the heart you want good things to be received, nurtured, and brought forth so the mouth speaks in response from those things. He is reshaping their thinking, breaking their paradigm, to show where their focus should be because that is where God's focus is. He wants a heart well-fed and nurtured for a person to speak undefiled.

Afterall, what good is it to follow all the rules, do all the correct things, keeping the kosher, when what comes out of that same person's mouth condemns. We are looking at keeping the new commandments of "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and with all thy mind" and likewise, "love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law." Feeding the heart correctly is perhaps a bit more important to fulfill those commandments than feeding thy belly, so it too will pass, literally.

I think of Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart" and Proverbs 18:21, "The tongue has the power of life and death." Give life to others with the passing of your words, not condemn them to death. Take that to the highest limit in social justice, in removing discrimination, in speaking in kindness to your children and others, in loving thy neighbor, and remove condemnation. Those words need to spring from your heart, not from the meal you ate the night before.