

*1 Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, 2 they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. 3 (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; 4 and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles. ) 5 So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" 6 He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; 7 in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' 8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition." 9 Then he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition!... 14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: 15 there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." 17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 He said to them, "Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, 19 since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. 21 For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come*

There are many reasons a pastor might choose to do continuing education. We chose conferences so we can better hone our skills, or because it's located somewhere like the beach or the mountains, or, in my case, I once went to a conference because I liked the band that was leading the worship services. Yes, I know, shallow. I can't remember what the conference was even about, but I still remember my excitement for the worship services.

As I watched the band take the stage, I noticed they had a guest, a flautist, and I thought, this is going to be beautiful. But when they started their first song, I noticed the lady with the flute was showing obvious signs of distress. Her body language was of a person on the edge of panic. She was suddenly fidgeting with her music, looking around anxiously. She hadn't appeared nervous at all when she took the stage, so it was obvious, something had gone wrong. The moment came when she raised her flute and started to play...and it was horrible.

It quickly became apparent that she was very talented, it wasn't her skill that was lacking. The problem was the band had started the song in a

very...very...different key than her. Later, the band leader apologized, admitting he started them in the wrong key and there was simply no way for the flautist to adapt.

The thing that struck me was that they all just kept playing...confidently! It was not a joyful noise. It was barely even music. But with a “show must go on” mentality, they went for it with all they had rather than admitting it wasn’t working. I kept watching them trying to see if one would give in...would the band change to the right key? Would the flute find a way to adapt or maybe just quit playing so the dissonance would stop? Nope.

I will say, we went on that night to have beautiful worship. Everything else went as planned, but all these years later I still remember the awkward pain of that first song, when harmony was elusive and the musicians on that stage were at odds when they should have been united. It is why you will often see a group of musicians standing around tuning their instruments before the performance starts, they want to make sure they are tuned to the same key so the music sounds harmonious not dissonate.

It kind of reminds me of the stories of Jesus and the Pharisees confronting one another. They all love God, they all are devoted to their faith, they are all of the same faith, and yet they are like a band in which one of the instruments is playing in a different key.

The Pharisees are completely and confidently devoted to keeping the laws of piety that prove their love for God. The more holy they can appear, the more strict they can behave, the better their standing with God. It is how they turned 10 commandments into over 600 legal statutes. They weren’t trying to be difficult, they were trying to glorify God and thought extreme control was a way to do it.

Then you have Jesus, equally wanting to glorify God but his approach was less about strict obedience and more about showing love and understanding. His approach was to build relationships, to love on people where they were and offer them the guidance to transform into the person they could be if they turned from sin and lived in line with God’s will.

I just spent a couple of days with my grandkids and niece, and I lost count of how many times I heard an adult say, “Did you wash your hands?” every time a kid reached for a snack. The Pharisees are like us fussy adults wanting everything clean and perfect, while Jesus is like my grandson who, upon being asked if he

washed, looks at his grimy hands, brushes them down the front of his shirt and reaches into the bag of chips anyway. At this point the Pharisees are struggling to see how Jesus could even be related to God, let alone his son.

Both Jesus and the Pharisees want to glorify God...this is the song they want to sing...but they are not in tune with each other. Both play the song confidently, neither want to change, and so harmony will not be possible. Especially when Jesus calls them a bunch of hypocrites. You might notice in the scripture reading a few verses of Jesus' argument were left out. In those verses Jesus refers to the Ten Commandment law to honor your father and mother, yet called out the Pharisees for finding a loophole. At the time in which they should have been supporting and caring for their aging parents, there were some who instead said, "Oh, I can't afford to care for you, my extra money is going to the glory of God."

What Jesus is pointing out here is that we can get so caught up in obedience to laws we have created, that we become blind to the purpose God intended when God gave us laws. The Ten Commandments are truly about relationships. The first 4 are how we are invited to live in relationship to God and the last six, in how we are to live in relations with others, respecting boundaries and showing love.

When confronted with a law that isn't even listed in the ten commandments, about washing his hands, Jesus says, it isn't what you eat, what you take in to your body that defiles you, it is what you put out into the world that does that. It is how you act, how you treat others, how you honor others, that are proof of your faith, not how well you manage to wash a pomegranate.

If we proclaim God with our lips, but our actions are hurtful, judgmental, rude, or disrespectful...what have we really proclaimed? We can see similar arguments today within the Christian faith. Some who want a strict adherence to laws and others who want to live lovingly in the nuances of life, meeting people where they are and walking alongside them as they seek to come closer to Jesus. Some who say, we must stand up for the right behaviors of others and some who say, we must make sure our behaviors are right toward others.

Same band members, different key. The music we produce is difficult for the world to listen to. It is confusing, not pleasing. We need to get in tune. We need to tune our lives, tune our actions, tune of motivations, to Jesus. We need to be tuned to sing the praise of the one who taught us how to live for healing, feeding, loving, and nurturing the world. We need to be tuned for praise to the one who

taught us self-sacrifice and showed us the outstretched arms that embrace rather than push away.

In a moment, we will invite everyone to come to this table...we will not be quizzing you on whether or not you washed your hands...but we will ask you to pray a prayer of confession so that you can wash your heart clean. Jesus said that is the important part...the state of the heart.

To live with the attitude of the Pharisees would be to limit access to this table...it would be to limit access to those who were so hungry that they didn't take time to wash their hands, or those who didn't have the clean water to do so. But to open the table to all people allows free access to God...which is what Jesus came to provide.

Wouldn't it be a beautiful life song for everyone to live in the ability to welcome, not judge...to accept, not exclude...to love, not hate? It is the song we yearn for, and one only achieved when every instrument is tuned to the same key – the key of praise for the one who taught us how to love.