

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



September 1, 2024

PURITY

getting the wrong idea

by Drew Downs

I wasn't raised in a purity culture. In many evangelical and charismatic spaces, there is a particular obsession with purity and maintaining it—particularly for women and children. And almost exclusively around matters of sex.

Purity culture is expressed as a means of devotion, in following Jesus more fully. Which makes Jesus's response to these concepts of purity in Mark 7 so strange.

I don't mean to ridicule other traditions or interpretations. Jesus himself focuses **away** from bodily concepts of purity retention and toward the ways we defile other people *with our words*.

While many focus on physical intimacy, Jesus is teaching about not being a jerk. Let's connect this with his teaching about the commandments: that we aren't to abuse and exploit other people for selfish reasons.

ORDINARY TIME

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Labor Day

As we approach the unofficial end of summer with Labor Day weekend, the early arrival of pumpkin spice and Halloween decorations, school and all things associated with the academic year, I want to take a brief moment to invite us to remember a holiday associated with the *end* of summer vacation and its vision that *ensures* we have summer vacation.

Given the centrality of Sabbath rest in our theology, we'd be remiss if we neglected to remind ourselves of the relationship of work and rest to the natural rhythm of life. And, because there is near absolute certainty that every one of us is in a constant state of awareness of work—from the physical labor of working in an office or at home, to the emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual labor of caring for others, serving the community, and honoring the love of God with our neighbors—we tend to give far less attention to the need to rest from our labors. And not merely rest, but to unplug, refrain from working, and providing for one another the regular example of living a life that works *against* the work clock, not merely according to it.

For people of faith, Labor Day is not a Christian Holy Day, but it is a holiday that resonates with the holy foundation of our faith. It is, at its core, about an active resistance to an out-of-balance obsession with work. And one that, at its core, is about preserving rest, not just for oneself, but also for one's neighbors. Because Sabbath reminds us to share rest and relief—liberation—with everyone.

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 17B

September 1, 2024

Collect

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

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

When the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; 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.) 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?" 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; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'
You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

ORDINARY TIME

Reflection

There is something delicious in listening to a clapback. When somebody responds to another person's criticism with a bit of turn-about; a sort of Well, why don't you do this thing, Mr. High and Mighty! We might read this week's gospel with that same level of sass. Or we might find ourselves reminded of the Russian psyops technique known as whataboutism: which is when one wiggles out of their problem by suggesting their opponents are hypocrites who are guilty of that same problem. Is this really what Jesus is up to this week?

I wouldn't say so. At least, not in the ways we think.

Both of the persuasion techniques I've describes are combative and intentionally undermine the authority of others, generally for some short-term gain. Jesus, however, is facing the same interlocutors he's been facing for five chapters—and they aren't being terribly honest. Nor are they likely to consider his teachings as valid.

More important than the honesty of Jesus's interlocutors is how Jesus turns the teaching around, using them as an example of his teaching itself. This the same thing he did all the way back in chapters two and three when his critics confronted him about the Sabbath. He used their restrictive, punitive, physical interpretation (often sited as the source of the tradition) to highlight the limitation of that interpretive strategy. Jesus is arguing that purity isn't about the act of hand-washing itself, for instance, but about *being a person of purity*. Which is why we are to worry less about *being corrupted* than about *being a source of corruption*.

The challenge for anyone in Jesus's shoes is not about getting the strategy "right". It is about keeping one's focus on what is good. And what provides a good experience for others.

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