

## Sermon

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St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Albuquerque, NM

29 August 2021

James 1:27-27 and Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Just Do It

DO! Don't just listen. DO!

This morning, in the letter of James, we heard the author tell us to **Be doers of the word, not merely hearers.**

DO! Don't just listen. DO!

Let's explore that idea through the lens of today's Gospel.....

In which Jesus said, what makes us less than we are called to be as Christians comes from our hearts.

What makes us less than we are called to be comes from our hearts.

Today's Gospel story seems straightforward enough. Here's what happened. Jesus and his friends have been traveling. They are tired and hungry and they stop to have something to eat. The church leaders (who are extremely concerned about the rules and regulations which they have concocted to make sure everyone is as "pure" as they are) complain to Jesus that the disciples didn't wash their hands.

Please understand they are not talking about simple hygiene. Rather the Pharisees and Scribes are talking about a ritualistic handwashing. In their rulebook, if you don't follow the guidelines, you aren't pure.... you aren't in the correct religious group.... you can't be a member of their country club.

There are rules and regulations and traditions which must be followed. And if Jesus and his followers do not conform to those rules, then clearly Jesus cannot be the Messiah people are claiming him to be.

Jesus begs to differ. In fact, Jesus changes the script completely.

Jesus said it doesn't matter what rules and regulations and traditions you follow. Those aren't what make you less pure. That isn't what makes you unclean. The word translated into our text this morning is "defile."

Jesus said, what "defiles" you.... what messes you up.... is what's in your heart. What makes you less than what God calls you to be is the nasty, uncharitable way you behave and how you treat people.

Jesus then helpfully gives a laundry list of activities which emanate from our hearts that cause us to be less than we are called to be.

Evil intentions  
Promiscuity  
Lust  
Theft  
Murder  
Cheating  
Greed  
Wickedness  
Lying  
Lacking moral restraint  
Envy  
Slander  
Thinking you are better than you are  
and...  
Foolishness

Those are the things (and I'll bet there are many more) which displease God.... not forgetting to wash your hands a certain way.

Jesus is making the point that bragging about going to church, or having memorized Bible verses, or making a big deal of how much money or time you give to charity, or telling people they are worshipping the wrong way does not please God.

It's what comes from your heart.

Although it would be fun to see how the church leaders responded, the story ends there.

Jesus said, what makes us less than we are called to be as Christians comes from our hearts.

This sermon could end right here. I've told you what Jesus said and we can just move on with the rest of the liturgy.

But here's the thing: While my husband and I were on vacation the first half of this month we went to church on Sundays in two different cities. Both weeks we heard sermons which were well delivered and interesting. But at the end of each one I thought, "OK, but what am I supposed to do now?" The preacher told me something and I could think it about for a while, but what am I supposed to do with the information I just heard.

What are we to make of the information Jesus has told us? He said that it isn't what you do on the outside – what rituals you follow – that help us draw closer to what God intends us to be. It's what in your heart. It's the actions you carry out in your day-to-day life which determine the kind of person we are.

I think what we do with this information is found in that other reading I referenced from this morning. We heard a portion of a letter James wrote.

James, although hard to verify probably a brother of Jesus and a leader in the early church in Jerusalem, encouraged the readers of his letter to:

**Be doers of the word, not merely hearers.**

James invites us to do more than just listen to what is said in church and what we read in the Bible. James tells us to **LIVE** the words of Christ.

Do! Don't just listen, DO!

James offers an interesting illustration of his idea. He writes:

“For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, ongoing away, immediately forget what they were like.”

I suggest we approach this mirror concept like this: you look in the mirror and see your hair is one hot mess and there is a huge piece of spinach stuck between your two front teeth. But then you leave the mirror and do nothing to fix your hair or remove that piece of spinach. You saw a problem and did nothing about it.

**Be doers of the word, not merely hearers.**

Don't just listen, DO! It does no good to hear what Jesus tells us and then do nothing about it.

**Be doers of the word, not merely hearers.**

I propose we put that into action with the lesson Jesus shared with the Pharisee, scribes, and us today.

Watch what is in your heart. If you notice there is something in there which does not align with the words and teachings of Jesus, do your best to remove it from your heart and mind and soul.

Don't just listen to Jesus saying “the things that keep you from being the person God called you to be comes from your heart” and then go about your week never thinking about this lesson.

At all times and in all places really do ask yourself what Jesus would want you to do. Adjusting Jesus' list of things which cause us to defile ourselves for our ordinary lives, here's s from some ideas from today's scriptures.

Make sure everything we do is done with GOOD INTENTIONS. Don't help someone with a good deed and expect something in return. Don't help someone and then resent them taking your time.

Always be honest. Tell the truth to those around you and – perhaps more importantly – yourself.

Always be kind. There is never a reason not to be kind to each other.

Be genuine.

Be affirming.

Acknowledge your faults.

Apologize when you are wrong. Accept apologies from others.

Be grateful for what you have. Be happy for other's who have more. Do not look down on those who have less.

Don't engage in idle gossip. Do not repeat anything you aren't certain is totally true.

Do not comment on things you know little or nothing about.

Do not be foolish....and don't be a fool.

Respect the dignity of every human being.

I suggest we spend time this week and think about your thoughts and actions. Do they align with the way Jesus has instructed us to live our lives?

We are called to be true followers of Jesus. We are called to love God with our whole heart and mind and soul and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus tells us we get tripped up in that quest when we allow thoughts in our hearts which do not promote God's love for all creation.

Jesus said, what makes us less than we are called to be as Christians comes from our hearts.

Jesus tells us to only allow good to come from our hearts.

James tells us to be doers of the word, not merely hearers.

DO! Don't just listen. DO!

We've heard it, now let's do it.