

4 Hearts Of Stone And Handwashing Series

Contributed by Roberta Karchner on Mar 14, 2020

Scripture: Mark 7:1-8, Luke 11:37-41

Denomination: Presbyterian/Reformed

Summary: Written in Midst of Coronavirus epidemic: The Pharisees criticized Jesus for not washing his hands correctly. But they had unclean hearts. In this time, what does it mean to have a clean heart

Mark 7:1-8 Easy-to-Read Version (ERV)

7 Some Pharisees and some teachers of the law came from Jerusalem and gathered around Jesus. 2 They saw that some of his followers ate food with hands that were not clean, meaning that they did not wash their hands in a special way. 3 The Pharisees and all the other Jews never eat before washing their hands in this special way. They do this to follow the traditions they have from their great leaders who lived long ago. 4 And when these Jews buy something in the market, they never eat it until they wash it in a special way. They also follow other rules from their people who lived before them. They follow rules like the washing of cups, pitchers, and pots.[a]

5 The Pharisees and teachers of the law said to Jesus, "Your followers don't follow the traditions we have from our great leaders who lived long ago. They eat their food with hands that are not clean. Why do they do this?"

6 Jesus answered, "You are all hypocrites. Isaiah was right when he wrote these words from God about you:

'These people honor me with their words,

but I am not really important to them.

7 Their worship of me is worthless.

The things they teach are only human rules.'

8 You have stopped following God's commands, preferring instead the man-made rules you got from others."

Luke 11:37-41 Easy-to-Read Version (ERV)

37 After Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee asked Jesus to eat with him. So he went and took a place at the table. 38 But the Pharisee was surprised when he saw that Jesus did not wash his hands[a] first before the meal. 39 The Lord said to him, "The washing you Pharisees do is like cleaning only the outside of a cup or a dish. But what is inside you? You want only to cheat and hurt people. 40 You are foolish! The same one who made what is outside also made what is inside. 41 So pay attention to what is inside. Give to the people who need help. Then you will be fully clean.

As we continue our series on the Stones of Lent, I want each of you to consider our focus for today. Hearts of Stone. This is how the Pharisees acted in their religiosity. They followed every tiny part of the Law, creating new ones in the process.

Over the last few days, we have been reminded that we need to wash our hands often. We need to maintain social distance. We need to be careful and stay home if we are sick.

And there are many videos online that are happy to teach us the right way to wash our hands.

I even found a wonderful list of songs online for kids where the song itself reminds them how to wash their hands. I shared a few of them today with our kids. (Link to possible choices after sermon)

But washing our hands is neither the beginning nor the ending of the process.

There are three things that we are being told at the moment.

Wash our hands, often.

Practice Social Distancing.

Stay home if you are sick.

I would like to address them in the context of what Jesus had to say, because I think that these things are important.

First of all, on washing hands.

Jesus wasn't opposed to washing your hands before you eat. He was opposed to worrying more about what was on the outside than what was on the inside. He said that what comes out of a person shows what is inside.

We can wash our hands constantly, and we can avoid getting sick as a result. But Jesus would ask us if we were already sick inside before we washed our hands.

There are many things that will cause our hearts to be unhealthy. But we often speak here about the two commandments that Jesus called us to follow. Love the Lord our God with all of our hearts, soul, and might, and Love our neighbor as ourself.

In this passage Jesus nails the Pharisees and tells them they need to give to the poor, something that is a common theme in his discussions. You see, the Pharisees were so busy following the law that they were missing the most important thing. They were failing to love.

They followed God out of a sense of obligation.

And while they might give money to the church if people were watching, it was all about show. They did not care for the poor or those in need.

Their hearts had turned to stone.

The second thing that they are talking about is social distancing.

Since I started my sermon in the middle of the week, we have seen a great deal about social distancing. We have seen events canceled. We have seen schools closed. We have seen our society turned upside down.

In South Korea, there was a church that was at the heart of that outbreak. A huge church that didn't believe in going to doctors. They told their members to pray instead of seeking medical help. As a result, they are the epicenter of the spread in that country.

This has caused people to look at churches as places where viruses get their start. One of the first advisories was to stay home from church.

The truth is that all gathering is a risk. When we gather together, in small groups or large, we carry a risk of passing a virus, whether it is flu (which is still going around) or CoVid 19, or any other common thing that is going around.

But gathering with people is at the heart of who we are and what we do. It is here that we don't just come together for worship, but we come together to serve. My heart is still overwhelmed by the love and care our churches showed this week in serving people from two funerals in two days.

In fact, the one on Monday was a bit of a miracle. When I walked in the doors and saw the crowd, I was concerned. The women of the church had been told that they would serve 30-40. There were around 200 at the time of the funeral. Afterwards, they served lunch to around 100 who attended. A miracle?

It was a miracle, a miracle of the people who came. They told me that as families arrived, they stopped in the kitchen, bringing dishes of food with them. And everyone had enough to eat. There was even food left over.

When I think of church, I don't think of it as a social gathering, I think of it in the way it happened here on Monday and Tuesday. People were taking care of people.

Jesus would call it loving our neighbors. That is what church is about.

We can be careful here, bump elbows, avoid that social touching we are used to. But still gather to serve the world. Our elders will make the choice on whether it is safe to meet. Each of us will make the choice about whether it is safe for us to attend. There is no right answer, only the answer we can live with.

We need to continue to be disciples whether we meet in this building or not.

Finally, we are told to stay home when we are sick.

This is important. We need to do this because loving our neighbor does not include giving them viruses. You might not be feeling that bad, but all of us need to protect one another.

There is a story of something important that happened during the time of the Spanish Influenza epidemic. The men were headed out to war.

One city decided it was important to have a parade, they figured it wouldn't change things. Because everyone gathered together, by the end of the next week, hospitals were overwhelmed.

A different city of the same size made a different choice. They called for people to stay home, they disinfected common areas. The disease passed more slowly among them. They had just as many people eventually catching the disease, but because it was slower, the hospitals in their city had a better chance of meeting the needs of the people. And with better care, fewer died.

So, what can we do to avoid hearts of stone in this particular crisis:

First of all, many of our nursing homes have closed doors, meaning our most vulnerable have no visits. They are lonely. Send them a card, lots of cards. If you know an elderly person at home, offer to pick up groceries or help them out.

Second, if schools need to be closed, many of the families in our community will be at a loss in providing lunches for the children. Contact the local schools to find out if there are ways that you can help.

Third, You might also contact places like Open Doors or the Open Doors Kitchen to see if they have special Needs. If you are concerned about going to the store and buying food, you can have it delivered to your car (my favorite) or order it online for delivery.

Another way you could help, if you aren't able to get out and about is to give the school or organization a financial gift to help them help others.

Finally, As the pandemic spreads into our area, nurses and doctors will be hard hit and will likely need to work extra shifts. If you know a nurse or doctor, ask what you can do to help them. Pick up groceries, bring a meal, watch children, whatever you can do.

We can respond to this emergency in one of two ways. We can criticize others for how they respond, Like the Pharisees, we can be critical. Or we can act like Jesus, opening our hearts and loving others. We can pray for all of those who are impacted.

Our response will show what is in our hearts.

Link to children's hand washing Songs:

<http://www.halseyschools.com/5-hand-washing-songs-your-preschooler-will-love/>