

*Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, 2they 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; 4and 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.) 5So 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?" 6He 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;  
7in vain do they worship me,  
teaching human precepts as doctrines.'*

*8You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."*

*9Then he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! 10For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' 11But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban' (that is, an offering to God)— 12then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, 13thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this."*

*14Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: 15there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."*

*17When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18He said to them, "Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, 19since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. 21For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, 22adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. 23All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."*

I glanced at the front page of the Plain Dealer Wednesday morning and saw the name Rosa Parks. Someone broke into her home, beat her, took fifty-three dollars that were lying out, but did not search for more and fled. I imagine the beating was in retaliation for her crossing a boundary.

The boundary had to do with buses, and the place of black people on buses. She would not go to the back. And with her act the time of boundary adjustment known as the civil rights movement began.

People do not like it when the boundaries they have established are adjusted. I can remember the anger in the people among whom I grew up over the battle over racial boundaries. Possibly the violence against an 81 year old Rosa Parks still reflects that anger.

So much of what we read about Jesus in the gospels is a battle over boundaries - the boundaries of the sabbath, the boundaries of association, especially eating, the boundaries of touch, the boundaries of ritual. People who worked on the sabbath were out, people who ate with sinners were out, people who touch lepers or menstruating women were out, people who ate without ritually cleansing themselves were out.

Jesus would not accept these boundaries, even though they were based in God's law. God's law said stone a woman caught in adultery. Jesus stood between the woman and those intent on putting her outside the boundary of life.

Jesus' disciples picked grain on the sabbath. Jesus defended their going beyond the boundary of sabbath law.

The custom of the day declared there is a boundary to be kept between righteous people and sinners, especially in meals. A godly person might have to buy fruit from a sinner, but a godly person would never eat with an ungodly person. But Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners.

So in today's gospel we read, *Now 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. So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him,*

*“Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders but with defiled hands?”*

Jesus disciples were not observing the boundary. The Pharisees objected.

*Jesus 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 traditions."*

Jesus is ready for a fight. He labels the Pharisees hypocrites, the word means actors.

Jesus is not ready to smooth things over, keep peace at all costs, quietly shuffle to the back of the bus. Jesus does not turn the other cheek to their attack, but counter attacks. Jesus speaks for God and labels the Pharisees with these words, *“This people honors me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.”* The religious people want to make community through shared outward observances; Jesus declares that God wants to own the hearts of God's people.

*“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 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.”*

It is as if with these words Jesus ripped whole pages from scripture. All the pages about clean and unclean food discarded. Whole sections of God's law, ripped to shreds by Jesus' words just as Rosa Parks tore the customs and culture of the south with her defiant act.

They killed Jesus for breaking down the boundaries.

God raised Jesus to let the world know where God stands in all of this.

God wants human hearts - your heart. You and I can dance and prance in every sort of religious observance but God wants our hearts. Getting the motions right, wearing the right clothing, having all the right understanding are all great folly if our hearts are not new in Christ.

Over and over we sing the prayer, "Create in me a clean heart O God and put a new and right spirit within me."

Create.

Making something out of nothing with God's word calling forth light where there was no light before and the land and the animals and people.

God spoke and it was.

Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Our hearts are not made new through evolution, a little here and a little there. Through our own effort, power and strength our hearts are like an apple shiny and red on the outside, but full of rot and worms inside. We do not love God; we certainly do not love our neighbors as ourselves. Shall we try a little harder? No we will pray: "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

And through the Word that spoke at creation, the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us, through God's Word Jesus Christ there will be a new creation, a prayer answered, a clean heart, a new and right spirit in you.

Jesus spirit, Jesus righteousness, Jesus in you.