

**Worship Outline including Reflection for the Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity**  
**Opening Verse of Scripture James 1.22**

‘Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.’

**Collect: Prayer for the Day**

Merciful God, your Son came to save us and bore our sins on the cross: may we trust in your mercy and know your love, rejoicing in the righteousness that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**First Reading: Deuteronomy 4.1–2, 6–9**

So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you. You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!’ For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to him? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today? But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children’s children.

**Second Reading: James 1.17-27**

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. 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, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. If any think they are religious, and do

not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

**Gospel Reading: Mark 7.1–8, 14, 15, 21–23**

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. (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 honours 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.’

**Reflection**

**‘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.’**

Our gospel reading this weekend records one of the episodes in which Jesus has a dispute with the religious leaders of the day. Mark has already told us that the scribes have determined that Jesus is demonic (3:22), and the Pharisees have begun a conspiracy to kill him (3:6). This is why they have left Jerusalem, to follow Jesus and try to stop him, if necessary, by murder. It is important to try and understand the Pharisees. They were not actually bad people, but they were extremely dedicated to obeying and pleasing God according to their traditions. The Maccabean martyrs were famous at the time for having died rather than defile themselves; they were Jewish people who had been tortured and killed for refusing to eat unclean food, particularly pork. The Pharisees wanted to maintain their loyalty to God and his laws, to remain distinct from the pagans around. The Pharisees were misguided, but let us not forget that they were

deeply religious men trying to be obedient to God's law and for Jesus to break God's food laws like this was scandalous.

In response, Jesus criticises the ritual laws of washing of hands before handling food, and of cooking vessels. However, he went much further. He gives Mark, the Gospel writer, a reason to say that all foods are clean! When he overrules the food laws, he is not attacking mere human tradition but the scriptures themselves. No wonder the Pharisees were angry and quite understandably, any good Jew would have been. The Pharisees attack Jesus and show that he is outside the cherished tradition which has been passed on to define the true people of God. Jesus has a completely different agenda, showing that these laws pointed towards him and now that he has arrived they are redundant! God's people had historically been defined within the racial boundaries of the Jewish people, Jesus was now calling all people and this included the very Gentiles whom the Jews had sought to be so distinct from. This meant that not only were all the distinctive Jewish practices redundant, they were a hindrance and Jesus had to show that they no longer had to be obeyed.

Jesus shows that it is not the foods that we eat or ritual defilement that makes us unclean, but the thoughts and feelings of our hearts. Jesus is unconcerned with the old categories of clean and unclean, he touched a leper (1:41), ate with sinners (2:15-17), and was not troubled that an unclean woman touched him (5:30-34). Jesus replaces God's old commandments with his own teaching, in effect, doing the same thing that he accuses the Pharisees of doing. The difference was that Jesus is entrusted by God to declare his new commandments directly.

Jesus changes the emphasis away from religious duties towards ethical behaviour. He teaches us to be especially mindful of thoughts and feelings that give rise to unethical behaviour in our relationships with family, friends and neighbours. It is those thoughts and feelings, conceived and nurtured in our hearts, that give rise to truly serious sins. What Jesus is saying is that he is offering a cure for the problems of sin in every human heart, not just Jewish hearts. For that we, mere Gentiles, should be forever thankful. Amen.

### **Post Communion Prayer**

Lord God, the source of truth and love, keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, united in prayer and the breaking of bread, and one in joy and simplicity of heart, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.