

Mark 7 – A God Who Breaks the Rules

1. Mark 7 is a complicated chapter – and a troubling one for those who have a cartoon Jesus. You see, Jesus was a very troubling, polarizing figure in his time. He was complicated. That doesn't fit into our 30min sermon boxes.
2. Cartoon Jesus's are out there everywhere. Jesus is nice, sweet, a smiling shepherd. He is always peaceful. He is always progressive. He is always super spiritual. He's a Republican. A Democrat. A rebel. A troublemaker. The Prince of Peace.
3. In other words...we have trouble seeing Jesus as a person, a human being in the middle of other human beings. The Book of Mark, more than the other Gospels, confronts us with the man – Jesus.
4. Mark 7 opens in familiar territory. The Pharisees are upset that Jesus's followers do not show God proper respect by observing laws of cleanliness. A casual reading of Leviticus (is that even a thing?) would show that God was and is very interested in cleanliness.
5. What the Pharisees were asking for is nothing more than we ask for when we ask people to pray before they eat or to be quiet and reverent in worship: things that make perfect sense to us and arise out of a desire to show that we recognize our God AND our need to be clean, separate from the world. Who could argue with that?
6. Jesus could – and did. Jesus had nothing against cleanliness but he had everything against those who kept the easy, outer rules and enforced them on others, making judgments on those others as to their faithfulness or worthiness...and who, then, ignored the hard commands.
7. That is hypocrisy: a play acted out before others. Jesus gives an example – Mark 7:9-13. They didn't seem to be bothered by the fact that their parents were suffering and dependent upon the charity of others (usually offered through the temple), but they WERE bothered that someone didn't do the ceremonial prayer they used to identify who was righteous and who was not.

8. I know of men who were on 100% disability and yet had a side business roofing houses. I know of men who spent their weeks attacking other Christians and then stood as gatekeepers of the Lord's Supper while love was absent from their lives and actions. I could go on.
9. Jesus said that nothing they did, none of the outer show of righteousness, meant a thing to God because, in reality, they only did what they wanted to do.
10. And then... Jesus blows their minds. Mark 7:14-23. He let the crowds and his followers know that the rules had changed. The rules had brought them to that day but they were to go with Jesus from here. It was a shock and there would have been people who left and didn't follow him anymore. But Jesus wasn't throwing away the Old Law; he was explaining that outer actions couldn't make up for inner sins and failures of the heart.
11. Remember, no one enters heaven in Matthew 25 because they worshiped right, organized their church right, and did the sacraments right. They went, if they went, because of the way they treated others. And he is about to give them an example that will rock their world... and make some of us uneasy.
12. Mark 7:24-30. He shows what life looks like if you keep the outer law and refuse to love, to show hospitality and generosity to strangers, to love your enemies. It doesn't look good, does it? I've seen churches refuse to join an effort to feed the poor because they didn't like the other churches involved. It's not a good look.
13. Jesus shows everyone what he is looking for: humility and faith. He doesn't care about your lineage, your heritage, your traditions, or mindless following of rules; he wants you to have the heart of God, a heart that loves and acts in love. For "he makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust." In the Matthew telling of this story, Jesus says to her, "woman, you have great faith."
14. We have a God who will break the rules if that is what it takes to show love, grace, and kindness. He calls us to follow Him.