

Pentecost 13 (Proper16)
August 26, 2012
Text: Ephesians 5:22-33
Theme: "Unloving, Disrespectful & Dirty!"

I love this Ephesians text because our reaction to it is a perfect example of what we too often do to God's Word. When we hear this text, we often start bristling about who submits to whom and who is head of whom and who has to love whom. Many pastors soften this text and say that Paul is just speaking from the context of his times. Others say that Paul doesn't know what he's talking about since he wasn't married and he's a male chauvinist. It seems to me that we either believe that the Bible is the Word of God or we don't, but if we pick and chose what we want to believe, then who finally decides?

God says through Paul exactly what he means. The husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church, and he is to love her as Christ loved his Church. The wife submits to the husband as the Church submits to Christ, and she is to respect him as the Church respects Christ. You don't have to like it. But it is what God's Word says. It is a struggle for us because no husband is perfect, so no husband loves his wife perfectly. Likewise, no wife is perfect, so no wife respects her husband perfectly. In marriage, we have two imperfect people struggling in an impossible situation for holiness. It would be easier just to ignore God on this one.

So what happens when we decide that we know better than God and so ignore his Word? We know he doesn't strike us down with lightning. So what does he do? In Isaiah, the people of God are making alliances with foreign powers to protect them rather than relying on God. God tells his people that since they think making these alliances makes more sense than trusting him, his word will be to them like a book that cannot be read. The Word is there, but no one can see it or understand it. The only way we can understand the Bible is through faith. That's why the Bible is unbelievable for unbelievers. They might think of it as a worthwhile writing of that period but without faith, God's Word is just a bunch of words written down by human beings and edited by 2,000 years worth of clergy. However, if it is read through the eyes of faith, the Word comes alive. And if one's faith is strong, the Word can be life altering.

In the Gospel, Jesus quotes Isaiah because the good church people of the day are more concerned with doing everything according to their traditions than they are with reaching people who don't know God with his life altering Word. Does that sound familiar to anyone? Haven't we all found ourselves at one time or another ignoring proclamation of the Gospel so that we can have things the way we like them? The way we are used to things being? The way

we have always done it? Just remember not to gang up too much on the scribes and the Pharisees because they is us and throwing rocks in glass houses is never a good idea.

They saw people who were followers of God eating with dirty hands and pointed it out because the rules were being broken. That would be no different from us getting angry with kids for making too much noise in worship or becoming upset with the property board for painting the wall a color we don't like, or mad at the Kantor for picking a difficult hymn. We have all been there one way or another. We all can become distracted from our goal of proclaiming the good news of Jesus' gift of salvation and focus on mundane, stupid stuff, and Jesus reminds us that we all have dirty hands.

So then, we come to St. Paul with his dictums that women must submit to their husbands and husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the church. Women? Don't like submitting? Too bad. It's the way God set it up. The husband is the head and you are the helpmate. Men? Don't want to love your wife more than you love your own flesh? Too bad. It's the way God set it up. A husband in the marriage is the visible symbol of Christ in the Church and he sacrifices everything for his wife. Now, do either husbands or wives do it perfectly? NO! WHY? BECAUSE WE ALL HAVE DIRTY HANDS!

We are all disrespectful, unloving, dirty people who can only approach God by faith! That's why Jesus died on the cross for us and left behind the Holy Sacrament of Baptism. We get dirty but the Baptismal waters flow over us day in and day out washing away the filth as fast as we collect it. So we can forgive one another as well. If my wife fails to submit, I can forgive her because I know that I fail to love and yet Christ has forgiven me.

Our hands get dirty because this world is a messy place. Rather than being respectful, we are disrespectful because we think that we will elevate ourselves by disrespecting another. Rather than loving, we are unloving because we think that we are the center of the world and more important than anyone else is. So do we want to do it our way and have the Word of God shut to us as a book is shut to an illiterate person, or would we rather wash in the waters of Baptism and be cleansed? Would we rather strengthen our faith with the body and blood of Christ and have yet another run at this whole holiness thing? Faith is our gift to use as we like. Live as unloving, disrespectful people with dirty hands or wash, eat and be the holy children of God.