

Pentecost 15 – September 2, 2018

Text: Mark 7:14-23

Theme: What Goes In Must Come Out.

**We are not concerned with food laws as Lutherans. We don't have to worry about mixing our milk and our meat or only buying kosher hot dogs if the store brand is on sale. I served alongside a Jewish woman on the board of Lutheran Child and Family Services and whenever the Board would go out to dinner, I felt bad for her because she went through such angst trying to find something on the menu that she could eat. I would be a terrible Jew. I would not do well with food laws. In fact, I would call them out as stupid and eat what I wanted.**

**Food laws are an example of where the people of God grasp one rule that God made for a particular time, a particular place and a particular people and elevate it to a commandment for all people, places and times. The food laws, given mostly in the book of Leviticus but elaborated heavily in the Jewish Mishnah and Talmud, were to set God's people apart from their heathen neighbors. They were outward signs to mark God's people as God's people. They were similar to circumcision. Circumcision was an outward sign of being a child of God and the food laws were an outward action of being a child of God. When you saw someone abstaining from pork, you knew, ah, that's one of those followers of Yahweh who came here from Egypt. Of course, they also served some health concerns as well. It wouldn't do to have the entire nation of Israel die from trichinosis before the savior was delivered.**

**Jesus reverses the food laws in the Gospel according to Mark. He says,**

**“There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” The point is that everything you eat eventually gets expelled so while the food laws served a purpose when the people of God were a brand new thing among people who had never seen people such as this, they were not magical. You are not more holy because you don’t eat pork, nor are you more sinful if you do because everything that goes in, eventually comes out.**

**But, having said that, Jesus took the opportunity to warn us about the nasty stuff that comes out of us. That is what should concern us. It’s funny how we can be so attuned to everyone else’s sin and completely blind to our own. Jesus understands that, but he doesn’t accept it. The problem is that food goes into the stomach and is eventually expelled, but sin comes out of the heart and, like a horrible, deadly virus, infects all the hearts around us. Sin can become an epidemic very quickly and sin, unchecked, kills faith.**

**I was just talking to one of my Midwest pastors who is in charge of youth ministry and he was bemoaning the reality that he cannot undo in one hour what parents do the rest of the week. He likens it to sports. If a kid was really gifted in soccer, I mean really gifted, and he only spent one hour a week working on that gift, how far would he progress? He tells the parents at his church that he is only the coach. The parents are the important ingredients for success. He can only supplement what they are doing at**

**home. So if a kid comes to youth group but never comes to church or Sunday School; and his parents don't often come either thus demonstrating to him how important hearing the Word of God is; and if there are no prayers, Bible reading, or devotions of any type at home, how far will that kid likely progress in his faith? See, if you are a horrible cook and your kid lives on frozen pizza and chicken nuggets, he'll survive and, in self-defense, he'll probably learn to cook himself. But if you flagrantly violate the third commandment and teach him by your actions that God's Word and the Worship of God do not really matter, now you are transmitting a horrible, deadly sin into his heart.**

**The Gospel, any good news of the salvation provided by Jesus, is elusive in today's texts, except in that the reverse is true. While Jesus warns us about the heinous sin that comes out of us, he also stands ready to feed us the cure, to put good food into us. The medicine for that sin is right there on the altar. Take the medicine and allow his body and blood to fill your sinful hearts and forgive you completely. This is not food that passes through you and is done. This is holy food that forgives your sins and strengthens you to overcome a sinful heart so that you can proclaim forgiveness and the love of God in all that you say and do.**

**Our will is bound. We cannot choose to be good, or love God, or invite Jesus to be our personal savior and live in the tabernacle of our hearts. It is impossible. Our will is always against God. That was why Jesus came. From**

**the day Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we have been trying to be God and failing miserably. We want to set the rules, to decide who is righteous and who is not, to judge others who do not meet our requirements. But we are blatant hypocrites. Jesus, who truly is God, deigns to come down from heaven and become us. He becomes us to fulfill the law and to pay the price of sin for us. He does what we would not do. He leaves being God behind and chooses humanity so that being fully human, he could be drown in Baptism, killed on the cross and raised to new life. And because he did that, we are given new life.**

**We are now God's resurrected people, no longer bound by silly human rules, but living each day to serve him, reveling in who Jesus has made us and leaving behind the ridiculousness of this world. We have been freed. When Christ died, we died as well. And when Christ rose from the dead, we rose as well. Our resurrected life has begun and the only person stopping us from living this new life is us. Don't hang on to old shame and old guilt. Don't live under a law you can never keep. Live the life Christ died to give you. Live a resurrected life. Listen to his Word. Eat of his body and blood. Keeping the rules will never help you because you will consistently fail and either you will lie and be self-righteous or you will give up and fall into despair. But his Word, his body and his blood will deliver you from this veil of tears and you will know joy.**