

Sermon 2009 Pentecost 13

August 30, 2009

Text: Mark 7:14-23

Theme: "Reformed Sinners Still Sin, But They're More Graceful"

When I was young, my brothers and sisters and I loved watermelon. In those days, produce was not shipped everywhere in the world and we lived in Seattle, so by late spring we had not seen an orange in months much less a watermelon. Now everyone knows that the heart of the watermelon is the prize and if you cut it lengthways, everyone gets a little piece of the heart right? So the minute my mother would slice the watermelon and you would hear that beautiful cracking sound as the two halves separated, and the room would fill with that glorious smell of sweet, ripe, fresh watermelon, at that very moment, my brother John, as fast as lightening, would lick his finger and plunge it directly into the heart of the watermelon, thus insuring that no one wanted any part of the heart after his spitty finger had been there.

He would make us so mad. Mom would yell at him but what good did that do? He had already marked his territory with his spit and he knew that my German Lutheran mother would sooner die than let the heart of the watermelon go to waste so he always got it eventually. She would make him wait until everyone else had been served but he didn't care because he knew he was getting the heart.

Now I have asked myself in the years since, why John's watermelon thing made me so angry. I mean, I was mad. We would have beat him to within an inch of his life if he hadn't been bigger and stronger than all the rest of us. It was only watermelon, but why were we so furious over it? I think it was because we followed the rules and he did not. He did what he wanted and did not see the family rules as being particularly important for him. To him, getting the best part of the watermelon was what was important and our feelings and concerns did not matter.

We were angry because he broke the rules, got what he wanted and seemingly paid no price. Doesn't that make you mad when you sacrifice your own desires to follow the rules and someone else breaks the rules, avoids the sacrifice and never pays the price? If that makes you mad, that's the Pharisee in you.

The Pharisee wants to be rewarded for keeping the rules and in order to try and persuade others to keep the rules too, the Pharisee tries to tell you that you are defiled when you break the rules – that you are dirty and he is not – that you must find a way to clean yourself so that you can be bright and shiny again. That was the point that Jesus was making for his disciples when they were in private. Don't be surprised when the Pharisees of the world try to put you down and make you feel insignificant for failing to meet their standards. That's what they do. They live for the heart of the watermelon and being the winners, the righteous, the perfect is how they feed their egos.

Jesus, on the other hand, has no fantasy that we will stop sinning. He knows full well that even when we are reformed sinners, we will still sin again and again and again. But the difference between a reformed sinner and an unreformed sinner is not that one sins and the other does not but that the reformed sinner

understands that he will continue to sin again and again and again but that Christ's forgiveness is limitless. An unreformed sinner thinks that the game is won by he who looks the best. He knows that he sins but if he hides it well, he can look righteous and seem righteous and that's all that matters. He gets the heart of the watermelon but loses himself in the process. The reformed sinner however, understands that the heart of the watermelon is not worth the cost. Why sacrifice relationships to gain some worldly prestige when Jesus has given us everything? We have nothing to prove. That's why reformed sinners are graceful people.

Sin will continue to come out of us and we will continue to vomit defilement all around us. Go ahead and keep track if you want. Knock yourself out, but Christ has already paid for everything I defile and one day, when I am dead, that defilement will be removed and I will no longer defile anyone or anything and I will live in peace and joy and purity. I will have the whole watermelon.

A sinner you will be. You can't fix that. Only Christ can, but you can be a reformed sinner. Reformed in the sense of recollected or regrouped. You understand the way things are and so you can be a graceful sinner. Sin you will - but forgiven you can be, washed in the waters of baptism, sustained by the Word of God and banqueting on the very body and blood of Jesus Christ himself. A graceful sinner: like a beat up, bald tire filled not with air but with pure gold; Like an old, cracked pot full of expensive French Champagne. Like one of those beat up, ugly, dirty watermelons off the back of some old guy's truck with a perfectly ripe, honey sweet heart. AMEN