

## **Exasperated**

Mark 6:53 - 7:13

August 30, 2015

I am exasperated! Do you want to know why? OK, I'll tell you why!

*Some Pharisees and teachers of the Law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus ...*

From Jerusalem. These guys had come a long way! It's a hundred-mile trip from Jerusalem to Gennesaret. On foot, it would have taken five days -- five days there and then five days home .

They came all that way to see Jesus. Because? Because of all that has been happening in Galilee. People, people all over the region, seeking Jesus out, running to him when they caught word of his whereabouts, bringing to him their sick children and sick neighbors and sick friends, begging Jesus to at least let these sick ones touch the edge of his cloak.

Because when they did, they were made well! People were being healed of their illnesses. Hungry people were being fed. Oppressed people were being set free from the demons that bound them. People were being told their sins, all their sins, were forgiven. And, even, so it was told, a little girl, the daughter of a leader of one of the Galilean synagogues had been raised from her death bed.

This is what was happening in Galilee and the Jerusalem clerics came all this way to see for themselves, to see Jesus for themselves, to check out this new rabbi. They came amidst the healed ones and liberated ones and forgiven ones and the ones amazed by Jesus' spiritual power and authority, and they saw? What did they see? Improper hand washing technique.

*Why is it that your disciples do not follow the teaching handed down by our ancestors, but instead eat with ritually unclean hands?*

It's not a question. It's a challenge. The scandalous behavior (unclean hands!) of his followers render this rabbi suspect. The validity of his entire ministry is being called into question, because he is clearly not orthodox enough, not properly observant, not one of them.

What does Jesus say? Does he defend his ministry? Try to justify or explain or excuse the behavior of his disciples? Point out all the ways he and his followers do indeed follow the teachings handed down by their ancestors? Protest that he surely is one of them?

No. Because he is not one of them. The law Jesus obeys comes not from any ancestor or any rabbi, but from God. Jesus is not embarrassed or flustered or put on the defensive by their question. He is exasperated! "Hypocrites!" He quotes Isaiah, he is Isaiah, speaking again the word of the Lord to the people: "You honor me with your words, but your hearts are far, so very far, away from me." Instead of obeying God, you find excuses not to help, not to take care of your mother and your father, not to love your neighbor.

Now do you understand why I am exasperated?

I call myself a Christian, a follower of Jesus, but what is the public persona of Christians in our day? Are Christians feeding hungry people, like Jesus did? Or are they attacking the welfare system because it undermines personal responsibility and drains the public's wallet -- and their own -- and because, of course, "the poor will always be with us?"

Are Christians welcoming strangers and outcasts and unwanted people, like Jesus did? Or are they fervently supporting candidates who want to build walls on the border, and kick the strangers out?

Are Christians setting people free of the demons that bind them, overcoming evil with good, like Jesus did? Or are they clamoring for a stronger defense, for tighter security, for strict protections for our way of life and our so-called "Christian" nation?

Are Christians obeying God's law, the law of love, like Jesus did? Or are they feverishly defending their own territory, their own prerogatives, their own rights, their "Christian" freedom?

This is the shameful public persona of Christians in our day. People who draw lines. People who themselves separate the sheep from the goats instead of leaving that to God, while oblivious to the fact that they themselves are numbered almost certainly among the goats! People who make war against the infidels, against the atheists, against the immoral, instead of making peace. People who whine about being persecuted, forgetting that Jesus told them to expect to be persecuted and to be happy when they are!

"You honor me with your words, but your hearts are far, so very far, away from me." You remember Jesus' story about the helpful Samaritan. The Samaritan is a man who, from the Jewish point of view, gets religion all wrong. He is not one of them. He is not a Jew. He is not a Christian. But Jesus makes clear that he is the one who gets it right. He is the one who lives the gospel. He is the one whose heart is close to God's heart.

Jesus was exasperated. So what did he do? He spoke out, telling it like it is, naming the hypocrisy. Then he left. He went away and carried on, carried on doing God's work, fulfilling the law of love.

I am exasperated. Are you exasperated, too? Then what should we do? We need to speak up! We cannot let a perverse form of Christianity that has little to do with the way of Jesus dominate the public conversation. We have to stand up and claim our name -- Christian! -- and proclaim what that means.

And we have to back up our words with our actions, with our love, doing what Jesus did -- feeding hungry people, liberating enslaved people, loving our enemies, forgiving our debtors, welcoming strangers.

The phrase on the bulletin cover comes not from Jesus, but from Peter, from Peter's first letter, but I think it well expresses Jesus' own sentiments: "Love covers over many sins." In other words ... if you get love right, if your heart is in the right place, who really cares about dirty hands?