

**Bennochy Church: 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2012** My children never used to eat curries, they do now. Most children are not that keen on green vegetables, no matter how much we might say they are good for them. . As we get older, our tastes change. Today we feast on foods from around the world. You will have your favourites. Would we find you in the Nepalese restaurant or buying, not just any meal, but an M&S meal? Do you go for the exotic, or are you the “traditional” meat and two veg?

In 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, if you were a Jew, there were a whole raft of regulations about what you could eat, what was considered unclean and how foods should be cooked. Some of the regulations are listed in verses 3-4. This was a big problem for the early church that Mark is writing to, and the question being raised is this, how far should the early followers of Jesus, detach itself from its Jewish origins?

So we find here Jesus response to the accusation that his disciples are eating with ritually unclean hands. What is going on here is more than good hygiene. This is all about how the laws of God are to be interpreted in a new age. The accusers are the Pharisees, seen as the traditional upholders of the Law, and the new interpretation comes from Jesus himself. It is a legal battleground, but much more than that, and not held in court but amongst a crowd in Galilee.

The reputation of Jesus is spreading widely. So much so that Pharisees and teachers of the law come from Jerusalem to see

what he is saying. For them the rumours are not good, and they seek every opportunity to pin something on him and his followers.

Since Jesus is seen as the rabbi, he is asked, why do you allow your disciples to eat with ritually unclean hands? You know the Law? (Done this before, 2:18, 2: 24) Instead of going on the defensive, Jesus jumps straight in, no messing here! He uses a prophecy from the Old Testament, the book of Isaiah, and says; you are the hypocrites that the prophet speaks of. Your words are fine, but the heart is far from God.

Remember, Jesus is speaking here to the religious leaders of the day. He does not hang back. What is the point of you worshipping God, your rules are man-made, but you teach them as if they come from God. Can you feel the anger building up inside them? How dare he! Jesus is not finished; you reject God’s law in order to support your own rabbinic interpretation of it. Their position is being challenged, not for its own sake, but to teach the truth of God’s law.

We are now coming to the crux of this confrontation. Whose interpretation is right? We all interpret things differently, the story in the newspaper, the TV report, local gossip, the Raith Rovers score line and even scripture. If we witness the same event, very often our interpretation is different, because of our perspective of how we see the event or hear the words is different. We have been part of these kinds of arguments with

other people, and like the Pharisees, we have often got it wrong, blinded by our bias.

After an obscure example from Jew Law, Jesus calls the crowd to him. Listen and understand he says. So think of yourself as part of the crowd. Jesus calls us to listen and to understand the things of faith. This particular example is based on the religion and culture of the time, but is now expanded by Jesus to include all of us.

It is not what goes inside a person that makes them unclean, i.e. purity contaminated by touch, but what comes out of them. Jesus is here challenging one of the key boundaries, set up in Judaism that separates Jew and Gentile. He is effectively saying, God wants this barrier removed. There are times in life when we set up our own barriers between people. We might not do it consciously, but we do it none the less. Our views, beliefs, and values can all cause division and of course we think ours are right!

Fast forward a few years to the apostle Peter on a roof in Joppa. He receives a vision from God of many animals and is asked to eat, but there is a problem. He can't obey because of the Jewish food regulations. Acts 10 contains one of the great boundary and barrier crossing stories of the New Testament. Up to that point, the Jesus faith was confined within Judaism and those God fearers who had converted. The vision to Peter clearly challenges his understanding of how the story of Jesus is

to be taken beyond Judaism? And then something amazing happens, Peter travels to meet a man called Cornelius, a Gentile, who receives the Holy Spirit. The Spirit breaks free from a box that the early church wanted to keep God in. God says and shows to Peter, no one is unclean in the eyes of God. I wonder how often we keep God in a box, because it is comfortable that way for us!

Peter must have heard Jesus speak these words to the Pharisees, but it did not fully sink in till after his vision at Joppa. There is a time lag here, between listening and understanding. It often happens in that way in our lives and in the life of the church. God speaks, yet it takes time for us to understand. We don't always get it right away.

Jesus is much more concerned with the heart than the gut. We might not relate to language of 'immortality' or some of the things on Jesus list, but whatever we do wrong, and we know what that is, comes from within us and not from without. That is how we are made. That is why we are human, created, the clay and not the potter who is the creator.

This is a great example of Jesus fulfilling the law of God, and as often happened in the teaching of Jesus; he states the principle and leaves us to decide on details. May we be guided by the Spirit of God to break down barriers we have created, in our lives and in the life of our congregation, and follow where the Spirit leads. Amen.