

### The Collect

*Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.*

### **Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23**

*When the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,*

*'This people honors me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me;  
in vain do they worship me,  
teaching human precepts as doctrines.'*

*You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."*

*Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."*

***"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."***

**There are weeks when I look at the readings assigned and I think ok, which one should I focus on, because there seems to be no connection between**

them. Or there are weeks like this one, when I look at the readings, I can almost literally see a beautiful thread woven through each and then reaching across the page to the next, connecting them and speaking across generations of faithful folks, with one voice.

This week is a strong thread week. I see a strong blue thread, not dark like navy blue or cute like baby blue, instead, a vibrant blue strand coursing through these readings.

The first thread is in the collect, our opening prayer, asking God to do surgery on our hearts:

“Graft in our hearts the love of your Name...” Don’t let us dabble in our faith, wander in and out, but no, graft, implant, surgically attach or embed in our hearts love for your Name, love for you, dear Lord. The one who, the collect goes on to say, will:

“...increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works...”

We so need that surgery, urgently, graft in our hearts love of your Name, but we can spend most or all of our lives saying...later....later.

Our Psalm goes on to describe, using that favorite word of mine from last Sunday: “...Lord....who may abide on your holy hill?” Who abides, who is at home with you?

The description of that person proceeds from the psalmist: “...leads a blameless life.....speaks truth from their heart....no guile from their tongue...(no deception, tricks) does no evil to their friends, does not heap contempt upon their neighbor.”

No contempt heaping.....no disdain, judgement of ones neighbor, no looking down on anyone.....those folks abiding, at home with God.

And that brilliant blue thread keeps going, weaving onward as our heads

spin as to what it means to be a Christian.

In our Epistle reading from James we are called to "...be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger..."

And finally in our gospel from Mark, Jesus is in dialogue with the Pharisees who are trying to trap him in doing something wrong, they accuse Jesus of not demanding that his disciples follow the rituals of washing their defiled, or tainted hands before eating.

So Jesus stands the old rules on their head, and suggests that the defiling, the tainted ways do not come from what goes into us...no the defiled, the polluted comes out of us, out of our mouths. And Jesus hits all of our pollution, from fornication to folly. I'll choose just a few to highlight....wickedness, envy and slander.

That gorgeous blue thread encircling the gospel with Jesus spelling out that the tainted, the rotten comes over our lips, in the words we choose to say to one another, the actions we choose to take.

We so need that surgery.

"Graft in our hearts the love of your Name..."

Last December Food Pantry day was a cold grey day, and, though Christmas was just 2 weeks away, folks were tense and jittery. Covid cases and deaths were hitting all time highs, and if possible, people were staying home, which was not possible for many of our clients who work in supermarkets, the hospital, and other places with front line workers.

One of my jobs, when the Pantry was at SMWC, was to go out and direct the traffic in the parking lot. I quickly learned that I had to keep track of which line, which car was next in line. At first, I was pretty casual about it, figuring everyone will get their turn.

But I was not remembering to put myself into another's shoes, the shoes of those who live daily in economic uncertainty. When you are poor you spend

a lot of time waiting. I remember when Tim had a church in DC many years ago, he would notice the faces of the people mostly women waiting for the bus along New Hampshire Ave. They were patient in a way he realized he had never been, because he did not have to be. Unable to afford a car, they learned to wait.

So my cavalier attitude towards who was next in line at the Pantry was a mistake and rude of me. I learned to keep much closer count on who was next, and to put a cardboard marker on the last car in each line so I knew when to move to the next line.

But my system was not perfected by December, and a woman opened her car window and yelled at me that I was letting others ahead of her unfairly.

I tried calm reassurance, even though I was not sure I was right as to who was next.

But she got angrier and so did I.

Our raised voices frightened other clients, and alarmed some volunteers.

Finally, I knew I had to keep order even more than being right, and using my strongest “teacher voice” told the woman to stay in line or leave the Pantry.

She was so angry, but stayed. And then drove off shooting venom from her eyes at me as she did.

I thought about her for days. I was angry, worried, doubting myself, and concerned for the tone of the Pantry, and most of all dreading seeing her again in January.

We so need that surgery.....

“Graft in our hearts the love of your Name...”

“...be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger...”

The January Pantry dawned sunny and bright, an unusually mild day for January.

The woman was not in the lines of those arriving early for the Pantry, when I went out to greet folks and to, with extra care and attention, mark cars and determine the order of the line.

The Pantry started and was busy, so I did not notice when the woman appeared again, all of a sudden in one of the lines as I directed folks forward.

My heart sunk and I was filled with worry. But she jumped out of the car a smile on her face, immediately offering an apology and speaking of how hard December was for her, and the emotions of the holidays and all that could not be.

That gorgeous blue thread seemed to be woven through her hair.....

“Graft in our hearts the love of your Name...”

“...increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works...”

She owned what she had done and allowed me to know a bit of the pain that made her short tempered in December.

I was SO grateful.

The relief I felt was amazing, and God worked on my heart, maybe not a graft but at least a start.

So I could let go of my anger, allowing to dissolve the tainted rotten words I wanted to say, to blame, to not let go.

And we both were free.

We humans waste SO much time holding on to our angers and resentments, like twisted treasures.

Wanting to be right so badly, that we do not see our clenched fists, cannot see how we walk away from our God.

Grafting is a slow process, lifelong for most of us.

“Graft in our hearts the love of your Name...” Don’t let us dabble in our faith, wander in and out, but no, graft, implant, surgically attach or embed in our hearts love for your Name, love for you, dear Lord.

The one who will:

“...increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works...”

Who can teach us to “...be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger...”

Who can teach us to do no evil to our friends, and to not heap contempt upon our neighbor.

Such rich readings today, woven together with that brilliant blue thread. It is one of those weeks when you might want to take your bulletin home with you, and re-read these readings.

We can re-read them as we each sit in the waiting room, waiting for our appointment for that grafting , for our heart surgery to begin.

Amen.