

Week of February 27 – March 4

Conflict over Ceremonial Uncleanliness (Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23)

Some of the scribes and Pharisees from the Temple approached Jesus asking him why he allowed his disciples to eat without washing their hands, claiming that he was teaching them to violate the longstanding religious tradition. “No devout Jew eats before washing his hands because he knows his hands get soiled while he goes about his business, “ they argued arrogantly. “What are you teaching your disciples? They should not only wash their hands but should also clean their plates and pots and wipe their tables before they use them, like we do.”

Jesus snapped back, “And why do you hypocrites violate God’s commandment in the name of your religion? God instructed you to honor your parents. On top of that, you decreed that anyone who shows disrespect for his parents should be stoned to death. But you gloat and tell your parents they are lucky to have such fine sons while you show them no regard. Do you think such behavior is pleasing to God because you have made it acceptable in your religious circle? Isaiah nailed you when he prophesied, ‘They promote God with their lips, but they defy him in their hearts. They worship God in vain, teaching their religious traditions as though they were God’s.’ You wash your hands and clean your pots while you disregard many of God’s commands, replacing God’s will with your own.”

Turning to the crowd, he added, “Listen and pay attention! It isn’t the filth that goes into a man’s mouth that makes him defiled. It is the corruption that comes out.”

His disciples were concerned because Jesus offended the priests. “Every tree my Father doesn’t plant has to be uprooted,” he continued. “Don’t concern yourselves with them. They can’t see what they’re doing or where it’s taking them. If blind people follow blind leaders, they’ll both end up in a ditch.”

When they went inside, Peter brought the matter up again and asked Jesus to help them understand what he meant. Jesus explained, “Don’t understand? Can’t you see that what goes into your mouth is filtered by your digestive tract, and everything bad gets expelled? But what comes out of your mouth comes from your heart. That’s what shows you contaminated. All sorts of corruption and obscenities proceed from a man’s heart. His words reveal his evil, unfaithful, perverted, mean, greedy, proud, lazy, deceptive thoughts. Eating without washing your hands isn’t the problem.”

Ministering to a Believing Greek Woman in Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30)

Jesus left and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon to get away and rest. But a Greek woman from Syrophenicia heard he was staying at a nearby house and came to ask him to heal her sick daughter. Jesus ignored her at first, and his disciples asked him to make her go away because she followed them everywhere. Jesus told her, “I’m only here to reach out to the Jews. It isn’t fitting to occupy myself with those dogs outside Israel.”

“I understand, Lord, but even dogs get to eat crumbs that fall from their master’s table, she added. Jesus said, “You have great faith, young lady. Your daughter is healed.”

Healings in Decapolis (Matthew 15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37)

On his way back to Galilee, Jesus sat down on a hill and rested. Soon great crowds found him and brought people who were lame, blind, disfigured, and impaired, and he healed every one of them. He took a man who was deaf and dumb and, spitting on his finger, touched the man's tongue. Then he put his fingers in the man's ears, looked to Heaven, and sighed, "Be open." Immediately, the man could hear and began to speak. The onlookers were amazed and glorified God. "Is there anything Jesus can't do?" they pondered.

The more he sought seclusion, the more famous he became.

Feeding the Four Thousand in Decapolis (Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10)

People continued to come, and the crowd grew even larger. Jesus was concerned about sending them away because they hadn't eaten for three days, some coming long distances, and might be too hungry to travel back home. His disciples recognized there was no way to feed them all. Jesus asked, "What have we got?" He took the seven loaves they found along with a few small fish and told everyone to sit down. Then he prayed over the food and handed it to the disciples to distribute to everyone.

Everyone had enough to eat with seven basketsful left over. There were about four thousand men, along with many women and children. When they finished eating, Jesus sent them away and sailed to Magdala and Dalmanutha.

Another Encounter with the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:1-12; Mark 8: 11-21)

The Pharisees and Sadducees showed up and prodded him to prove his divinity. Jesus said, "You look at the evening sky and predict tomorrow's weather. Then, in the morning, you revise your forecast based on what you see. You hypocrites! You think you can forecast the weather, but you don't even know what's going on around you. You are a misguided unfaithful lot, and the only proof you'll get out of me is the sign of Jonah." Then he got into his boat and sailed away.

His disciples mentioned they were almost out of bread, and Jesus commented, "Be leery of what the Pharisees try to feed you." They assumed he was still talking about bread, so when Jesus overheard them, he said, "You're not thinking. I'm not talking about actual food. Have you forgotten how we fed five thousand men with five loaves and then fed four thousand more with seven loaves? Don't concern yourselves with their food. I want you to watch out for their doctrine. Do you understand?"

Healing a Blind Man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26)

When they arrived at Bethsaida, someone introduced him to a blind man and asked if he would touch him. Jesus accompanied the man out of town, spit on his eyes, held him, and asked if he saw anything. "I see figures walking, but it looks like a dense moving forest," the man replied. Jesus put his hands over the man's eyes and then told him to look again. This time he saw everything clearly.

Peter Identifies Jesus as the Christ (Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21)

Moving on to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples what people were saying about him. They said people were saying he was the spirit of John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or some other great prophet. "And what do you think?" he asked. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, God's appointed Savior," Peter stated.

Jesus said, "I call you Peter, which means rock, and I will gather my people and build my church upon your rock-solid testimony. The powers of Hell can't stop it. I give you the keys that unlock the kingdom of Heaven. You will be the instrument of opening the door of faith to the world, the first to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles." Then he told them not to tell anyone yet.

First Prediction of Rejection, Crucifixion, and Resurrection (Matthew 16:21-28; Mark 8:31-38; Luke 9:22-27)

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples how he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed only to rise to life after three days. "No way!" Peter exclaimed. "It can't be. Not you, Lord."

"Get out of here, Satan!" Jesus remarked, looking right at Peter. "You have no interest in God's plans. You only want to pursue your earthly interests. If anyone wants to go with me, he'll have to forsake his own pursuit and crucify his selfish inclinations every day, like me." He explained. "Whoever is clinging to his own ambitions will have to give them up. Whoever sacrifices his life to live for me will save it. After all, what does a man benefit if he gets everything he wants in this world only to lose his soul? What is his soul worth? Those who disregard me or ignore what I have to say will be disregarded and ignored when I return in glory accompanied by holy angels in my Father's honor. Of course, some of you who are standing here won't taste death before you see the kingdom of God coming with power.