

Year A, Proper 15
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Jesus said, "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles" (Matthew 15:18).

It's time for a change of heart. To that end I would like to begin my sermon with a statement from the East Jefferson Interfaith Clergy Association, of which I am an active member.

We come together as faith leaders of Jefferson Parish to raise our voices against white supremacy and anti-Semitism.

Our various traditions teach that we are created in the image of God, and that as creatures/children of God, we are equal in God's sight. The white supremacist movement proposes that some creation of God are worth less than others. This is morally abhorrent to people of faith and conscience.

In response to the rise of Nazism in Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated: "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak; not to act is to act." We understand that silence in the face of bigotry and oppression can be interpreted as complicity or agreement. We refuse to remain silent or gloss over this evil ideology and the violent actions that spring from it.

The white supremacy and neo-Nazism that has disrobed and come out of the shadows has a long history in America. We cannot deny our history. But we can and must, from this day forward, say: 'This is not who we *will* be.'

This is a non-partisan issue. Our authority to speak out comes from the Creator of All. We recognize that none of us is perfect, *and* that we are commanded into love and empathy.

We believe that though our world is broken, it is also inexplicably filled with light. We stand together to symbolize that light.

For allowing his disciples to not wash their hands before they eat, Jesus is accused of being non-traditional and therefore suspect in the eyes of the Pharisees. Such a charge carried great weight and was disturbing to Jesus' disciples. As people of faith they were seeking to be further enjoined to the people of God. Yet the authorities are implying they are close to being cut off from the body for their failure to behave in a traditional fashion. It's almost as powerful as a threat of excommunication from a church or a family. Such warning carry great weight and should not be glossed over.

In the second portion of the reading Jesus goes well beyond dietary restrictions when he not only converses with the Canaanite woman but heals her daughter. Yet before the conversion of

Jesus and the healing of the daughter, we see Jesus as fully human. First he ignores the woman altogether. Next he calls her a dog. We also see the one who is accused of being non-traditional to be using tradition as a shield, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24), but it doesn't work. The woman humbles herself to the degree that Jesus has a change of heart.

It's no accident that these two stories follow one after the other. In both cases, the subjects are confronted between tradition and right behavior. So often we assume that traditional behavior is the right course, and often it is, but not always. Those places where our tradition rubs us the wrong way are worthy of reflection and possible opportunities for a change of heart.

Tradition may live in our past and even in our present, but tradition for its own sake is not necessarily a Gospel Faith. We need always ask how our traditions stand up to the light of the Gospel. When they are deficient to the Gospel standard of love, it is time to let them go. We all know it's easier said than done. Such is the cost of discipleship. As we cross boundaries, barriers, and traditions that were upheld by our ancestors we can sometimes feel like we're betraying the very people who raised us, the people we love. What is more important, love of God or love of family?

When we run up against such dilemmas between God and family, we have to come to the realization that our forebears whom we did not know in person and some of our relatives whom we knew quite well were perhaps following social customs of the day. Perhaps they chose social convention and family over God

No doubt you loved your grandparents just as much as that man did, but sometimes our forebears got it wrong. Regardless the decisions we make today are not our grandparents'; they are ours. Enter Jesus who tells us and shows that we can always have a change of heart. Because of Jesus our past and present traditions need not be the future legacy we leave our own children and grandchildren. *Amen.*