

**When my children were little, I set their bedtimes.**

**I knew that if they had to be up by 6:30 to make the school bus on time and if they were to be rested enough to pay attention in school all day, they had to be in bed by 8pm.**

**But, eventually they needed to make that decision for themselves.**

**Eventually they needed to use good judgment and figure out for themselves how much sleep they really did need and what time they needed to go to bed so that the next day they were functional...**

**A good rule, a beneficial law helps an individual grow in their ability to make sound and wise and healthy decisions....**

**A good rule and a beneficial law is meant to help form the person or the community in a particular way for a particular purpose...**

**Rules and laws in and for themselves are worthless and harmful.**

**In our reading today, Jesus is not so much upset by the law of washing one's hands before eating...but with the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who follow the law to letter and at the very same time, totally disregard the reason for the law.**

**Why did the ancient Jews have these laws, which are called purity laws?**

**Well, that is a very long answer, too long for now, but one reason is that it help to distinguish the Jews from their pagan neighbors.**

**Jesus isn't really upset about the law...what seems to bother him is the disconnect between how the Pharisees appear on the outside and what is held in their hearts...**

**Jesus was essentially more concerned about integrity and authenticity more than he was about being law abiding and superficial goodness.**

**In Mathew 5: 17, Jesus says:**

**"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."**

**For Jesus, it was the pretentiousness, the hypocrisy of the Pharisees...  
their tendency to blame everyone else, to judge everyone else for the ill of the world  
and their tendency to deny their own shadow selves....**

**Now...before we start 'tsk, tsking' the Pharisees for their hypocrisy...  
we better look inside ourselves...**

**Have you ever heard the saying "If you spot it you got it"?**

**What that means, is if you criticize another for being arrogant or selfish...it can often be a  
red flag that you have those attitudes within you...**

**Jesus had a phenomenal way of getting straight to the heart of the matter...  
do you remember when he was asked what was the greatest commandment?**

**His response was: "You shall love the Lord your God, with your whole heart, you whole  
mind and your whole soul and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." People often say  
that these are the two great commandments, but in MAREK..... Jesus offers them as one.**

**For Jesus, love of God and neighbor could not be separated. You could not say you love  
God and then ignore the hunger of your neighbor...  
and we can all remember Jesus' answer to the question of just who is my neighbor...**

**The teachings of Jesus, the stories of the Scriptures are not separate events, separate  
teachings, but once you start seeing the thread that connects them all, once you start**

**connecting the dots, it all makes a lot more sense....**

**For Jesus, the essential core of the a person's relationship with God and the world was: Love. Compassion. Love. Mercy. Forgiveness. and Love.**

**Every law, every custom, every rule was meant to enhance a persons awareness and practice of these essential values.**

**If the law, custom and rule enhanced your ability to forgive...Amen, Sista!**

**If the law, custom and rule enhanced your ability to be more generous and compassionate....Right on, Brother!**

**Follow that law, practice that custom, uphold those rules....**

**But simply putting money in the offering box....**

**merely uttering the words: I forgive you means nothing,**

**if your heart is closed and cold and fearful...**

**following all the rules in the world means nothing.**

**For Jesus, it was the orientation of your heart which was...may I say,**

**'the heart of the matter'!**

**Do you remember in Matthew's gospel (Mat 5:21) when "Jesus said you have heard it said:**

**Do not murder...but I say to you, that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment and if you insult a brother or a sister you will be liable to the council..."**

**Rules, laws and customs were meant to nurture, shape and form**

**our hearts and minds towards love and kindness.**

**One more thing....and we talked about this a couple of weeks ago....**

**In our reading today Jesus says: "Listen to me, all of you, and understand:**

**there is nothing outside a person that can, by going in, defile.”**

**In other words, we can't claim like Flip Wilson did in the '70's that  
“the devil made me do it”.**

**We can't blame it on the internet, or technology.**

**We can't blame our parents or our boss....**

**Our troubles, our hurtful intentions, our slip up and mistakes  
come from inside,  
from the anger, fear and jealousies  
that inhabit the dark recesses of our shadow self.**

**Do we make mistakes, absolutely!**

**Do things that are not kind, that are selfish, and hurtful...**

**everyone does...**

**but that is our problem...we need to do the inside work of becoming aware,  
taking responsibility and making amends...**

**Gratefully that's where Love comes in so magnificently...**

**Love is the only emotion large enough to hold all of our beauty and all of darkness...**

**The magnificence of God's love always includes, always forgives, always shows mercy,  
always holds us, loves us until we can love ourselves...**

**and when we finally are willing and open ourselves to this kind of Love...**

**the only thing that we can possibly think of doing is to whisper, thankyou. amen.**