

Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, " 'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God)— then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Does anyone own a pet rock? What about a chia pet or a Cabbage Patch Kid? Maybe you have an old hula hoop lying around somewhere. If we look at the back of your closet, would we see your old disco outfit, complete with platform boots?

All of these things were fads—things that seemed to be the latest and greatest craze, only to be relatively forgotten after a time. They were the style of their day, and people couldn't seem to get enough of some of them. But now they lie forgotten in obscurity, until a nostalgia revival brings them to the forefront again.

We all know that times change and tastes change. What everybody wants today, no one wants tomorrow. Sometimes it is simply because technology has advanced: old '78's were replaced by 45s and LPs; and then there cassettes, then CDs and DVDs. But now, people simply stream their movies and music. Other times, people just lose their love or appreciation of the 'old things'. They grow tired of them and feel it is time to move on.

It is sad that our fickle attitudes toward the relatively unimportant things of life also show up in places where we hope and expect to see commitment, dedication and permanence, not fickleness. It is not just that we used to love a certain style of music or clothing and have moved on. So many people take that same approach to our relationships—with our friends, our family, our spouse, and yes, even with God. We are fickle people, We don't hold what is important in our hearts. We spend too much effort chasing after the things that don't matter.

Jesus once said: ***For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*** (Matthew 6:21 - ESV) What do we hold in our heart? What is of the greatest importance to us? Paul speaks in the epistle lesson of the love and commitment that should exist between husband and wife. Jesus speaks to us in our text of the love that we are to have for God. It is not to be a matter of going through the motions, but a love that clings to God and His Word in all that we do in life.

The title of this sermon sounds like it could be a line out of a bad country and western song: *"Your fickle heart, it makes me blue; you broke my heart, though I was true"*. The word *fickle* is an old English word that describes the changeable attitudes that a person has as regards their loyalties. In other words, the heart of a fickle person is not steadfast and dedicated; rather, we don't hold to the things that should be important.

When we think of fickle people, we most often think of those who are unfaithful in their relationships, especially with their spouse. But the word is a very apt description of the heart of sinful man. It is a word that helps us understand the words of Isaiah in our Old Testament lesson today; words which Jesus quotes in our text: ***"Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, " 'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'***

In our text, we see Jesus in a discussion with the Scribes and Pharisees over the behaviour of the disciples. The Pharisees always

laid the greatest stress on a strict outward observance of the law, including all the rabbinical traditions and regulations. They were extremely self-righteous, living under a hollow formalism in outward ceremonies, while setting aside true love for God and His Word of truth. The particular issue that arises when these Pharisees come to Jesus is that they witness first-hand that some of the disciples are eating *with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed*. This is not to say that the disciples were eating with dirty hands, as if they had just come in from the fields, and their hands were covered in mud. The word they use refers to “common hands”, and they are defiled or dirty because they haven’t gone through the ritual washing that the Pharisees saw as all important. That washing seems to have consisted in taking an egg-shell full of water, and pouring it across the hand, and allowing it to run down the arm. Mark also records that the Pharisees ‘washed’ in this way whenever they came from the marketplace. We, as a society, have become rather obsessed with hand sanitizing. I know that I sanitize my hands when I go into the hospital, and again before I go into a patient’s room. I sanitize my hands when I leave the room, and if I touch a railing or door, I will sanitize again when I go into the next room. But the Pharisees weren’t acting out of cleanliness or sanitary concerns. It was a ritualistic concern that maybe, just maybe, they had brushed up against a Gentile at the market, and that would make them unclean. All these things are the teachings of men; they were not part of the Levitical laws that God had given to His people. But these were the things the Pharisees loved. This is what mattered most in their hearts. As new rules were developed, they grabbed on to those rules, even if in doing so they were moving further and further from God’s revealed will in His entire Word of truth.

Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees comes from the Word that they claim is so important to them: *Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “ ‘This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* He also tells them: *You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!* As proof, Jesus talks of the Fourth Commandment: *Honour your father and your mother*. But the Pharisees were paying only lip service to this, too. In Jesus’ day there were no pension plans or government support for the elderly. Children were expected, even by the Fourth Commandment, to care for their parents. But some sons were saying to their parents: *Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, given to God)* By using this word in a religious vow an irresponsible Jewish son could formally dedicate to God his earnings that otherwise would have gone for the support of his parents. The money, however, did not necessarily have to go for religious purposes. The Corban formula was simply a means of circumventing the clear responsibility of children toward their parents as prescribed in the law. It is this attitude that Jesus condemns. You are fickle, He says. You say you love the Law and keep it, but you ignore the spirit and intent of the law, hiding behind the letter of your own traditions. What’s worse, you love the law more than you love the God who gave His law to guide and direct you in love toward Him and toward one another.

We often do the same thing in our relationships, especially in our relationship with God. Paul, in the Epistle lesson, speaks of the love that husbands and wives are to have for one another. If we say, “I love you”, but don’t show it, aren’t we being fickle? Aren’t we leaving ourselves open to temptations that can draw us away from our spouse? God wants wives to love their husbands by helping them to be the husband—the head of the house, and respecting him as such. Talk of love means nothing without actions. And husbands are to love their wives *as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*, (Ephesians 5:25 - ESV) Love isn’t about words—it is about a dedication and commitment that shows that a man loves his wife with a sacrificial love that is greater than any love he has for himself.

We can show that same fickle attitude towards God. David, in our Introit today said: *O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells*. (Psalm 26:8 - ESV) Or another psalmist says: *With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!* (Psalm 119:10 - ESV) But there are times when our hearts don’t love to be in church; there are times when we don’t want to do what God wants us to do. There are times when our faith doesn’t direct the thoughts and actions of our lives. And yes, there are times when we don’t *love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] might*. (Deuteronomy 6:5 - ESV)

Thankfully, God has never been fickle in His love. James assures us: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change*. (James 1:17 - ESV) God’s perfect gift from above is the gift of Himself, as Jesus lives among us. Jesus was never fickle. His love for us took Him to the cross, where He died to pay the price for our sins, so that we would be set free from sin and death. His love was greater than death, as He rises to give us life. In love, He calls us as His own through our Baptism, as the Holy Spirit washes us and works faith in our hearts. He loves us enough to come to us in the sacrament of Holy Communion, giving us His body and blood, which delivers us and gives us life. When He promises, *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*. ” (Matthew 28:20 - ESV), we can be sure that His love will never change. His heart will not be fickle. He will love us and help us and save us.

Our faith is not a fad. It is our very life. God is our Light and our salvation. He has always loved us with an everlasting love.

He will not change. And He, who calls us to His grace in Christ, gives us His Spirit, to *guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*. (Philippians 4:7 - ESV) May it never be that we become fickle to Him who has loved us so much, that He gave us His Son and all the blessings that are ours in Him! Amen.