

Mark 7:1-13

The Pharisees and scribes would fit in well today. The number of times they washed their hands would be applauded by health organizations everywhere. And not just their hands. Cups, pots, vessels, even the cushions of the couches upon which they sat down to eat. They must have been the cleanest, healthiest people around.

Yet they did not use soap. Just water. This was not a twenty-second sanitary washing. It was nothing more than a ritualistic cleansing. But they held to it as if their very salvation depended on it. And they rebuked those who did not.

Such as Jesus' disciples. In our text we see the Pharisees and scribes coming to Jesus to point the accusing finger. "*Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders?*" They were watching. They were looking for dirt, and they found it on the hands of Jesus' disciples.

Have you ever been followed by a police car? It's hard to relax even if you are doing the speed limit. You try to be the perfect driver as he follows you, and that's not easy because there are many traffic laws to obey.

You know that you are having a rough morning when a police car follows you all the way here to church, and once inside, the Pharisees take over and watch you closely ready to pounce if you slip up. Is there no rest for the weary?

Yes, there is. At least there should be. Here in the house of the Lord. And not just here. Your entire life, lived not under God's accusing finger, but under His grace.

God does have an accusing finger. The Ten Commandments. And Jesus pointed that finger at the Pharisees who were accusing His disciples. "*Honor your father and mother.*" The Fourth Commandment. Jesus accused them of rejecting this and the other Commandments of God. But not until they accused His disciples. The Pharisees drew their finger out to accuse, and so He drew out His to point at them.

But that is not why Jesus came. Not to accuse. Moses did that. Jesus came to use His hands in another way. To heal, to bless, to pray, to give the gifts of God, to be pierced with nails. And that is why this house was built. To be a place of rest for you. To be the place where Jesus comes to heal and forgive, to bless you with God's good gifts, to give you what His pierced hands purchased for you.

Something is not right, therefore, in fact it is entirely wrong, if you come here, listen, participate, yet leave feeling accused. Yet sadly this happens. It is not because God is a Pharisee who is watching you closely, waiting for you to slip up so He can pounce.

It is because we are Pharisees toward each other. There is a little bit, or maybe a lot, of Pharisee in all of us. Hypocrisy, being judgmental toward others. This happens in our families, and it is why in-laws can feel like outlaws. It happens here in our church family. We have learned from the Pharisees in our text to point the accusing finger at Jesus' beloved disciples. Perhaps we should learn also that when we point our finger at others, Jesus points His finger at us.

Rather than looking judgmentally at each other, which is nothing short of hypocrisy because God could, in truth, point the finger not just of accusation, but also of condemnation at all of us, we can look at each other the way Jesus does. He sees you as those who are the baptized. That was no mere ritualistic washing. It was the washing that took away your sin and made you, now and always, God's dearly beloved child. And no accusing finger can ever change that.

Rather, because God's finger accused Jesus as He hung on the cross for you, your entire life is lived under His grace.

We do not deserve any of this, for we are adulterers, thieves, murderers, drunkards, liars, and much more. But not to God. He calls you the baptized, His saints who are washed clean of all your sin, forgiven, in the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Yes, there are a lot of Commandments to obey, and we have all failed. We fail daily. Even though we try to drive perfectly through life, we fail miserably.

There was a teenager, a girl, who had just gotten her license to drive. She was on her way to school, but a patrol car was right behind her. And yet this did not make her nervous. Instead, this gave her relief and rest because that patrol officer was her daddy, following her to make sure she arrived safely.

This is why God watches you closely. Not to accuse you and condemn you. But because He is your dear Father, and you are His dear children. Your sins? They are forgiven. All of them. Jesus took care of this for you. And I don't mean for just some of you. Everyone of you is forgiven. Jesus took God's accusing finger, and He was condemned for all of you.

And so, be at rest, at peace. You are under grace, God's grace toward you in Christ Jesus. Amen.