

Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2018

Trinity 14

Proper 17 **Green**



### Collect

Almighty God, whose only Son has opened for us a new and living way into your presence: give us pure hearts and steadfast wills to worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

### James 1:17-27 English Standard Version (ESV)

1<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>[a]</sup> 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

### Hearing and Doing the Word

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. 26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

**Footnote:** a. Some manuscripts *variation due to a shadow of turning*.

**COMMENT:** The Letter of James is one of the anomalies of the New Testament. Because it makes few references to Jesus Christ, it was one of the very last to be included in the Christian scriptures. It has more of the flavour of a moral essay attributed to James, the brother of Jesus. It may well be a collection of the sayings of James, compiled after his martyrdom or a formal letter encouraging its recipients to live in a strictly ethical and deliberately spiritual way at a time of threatened persecution. In 5:12 it appears to repeat one saying which Matthew 5:34-37 attributes

to Jesus himself. However, the letter lacks any knowledge of the teaching of Paul, but does include some references to Palestinian culture. Scholarly estimates of its origin and date place it in Judea in the AD 60s immediately preceding the Jewish revolt against Rome that ended in the fall of Jerusalem. This passage contains several good but isolated preaching texts or themes: verses 17-18; 19-21; 22-25; 26-27. As a whole, it presents the view that those who belong to the believing community must avoid adopting the ethics of its oppressors. It reflects a dependence on God and strict adherence to Judaeo-Christian morality. Like so much other counsel of the New Testament in the gospels and in the Pauline corpus, it encourages the practice of ethical standards which separate Christians from their easy-going cultural milieu. No permissive “everybody does it” attitude can be found throughout the letter. This high moral standard is most clearly defined in the very last clause in verse 27. Is this a clarion call for the Christian Church today? This strict emphasis on moral behaviour is not isolated from the ultimate divine purpose. The idea of the Christian community as “the first fruits” of a new creation comes out in verse 18 and reverberates throughout the passage. Yet this does not inhibit good living. Rather, those who live in obedience to this strict moral standard find that it liberates and blesses (verse 25).

## **Mark 7:1-8,14,15,21-23** English Standard Version (ESV)

### **Traditions and Commandments**

7<sup>1</sup> Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem,<sup>2</sup> they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.<sup>3</sup> (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly,<sup>[a]</sup> holding to the tradition of the elders,<sup>4</sup> and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash.<sup>[b]</sup> And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.<sup>[c]</sup>)<sup>5</sup> 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?”<sup>6</sup> 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;<sup>7</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’<sup>8</sup> You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

### **What Defiles a Person**

<sup>14</sup> And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup> There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”<sup>[d]</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,<sup>22</sup> coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.<sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

**Footnotes:** a. Greek *unless they wash the hands with a fist*, probably indicating a kind of ceremonial washing. b. Greek *unless they baptize*; some manuscripts *unless they purify themselves*. c. Some manuscripts omit *and dining couches*. d. Some manuscripts add verse 16: *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear*.

**COMMENT:** In this biting rebuke of the Pharisees for their excessive attention to purification rituals, Jesus defined true piety. Apparently this tradition was sufficiently well known that Matthew also used it (Matthew 15:1-20). We can tell from the explicit details of Jewish purification rites in verses 3-5 that Mark had a Gentile audience in mind. Most probably, the gospel was written for a Christian community made up primarily of Gentile who knew little about the strict Levitical Code which the Pharisees strove so hard to impose on 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism. In verses 3-5, he addressed his audience directly on the assumption that they did not know the Jewish rules of food preparation. The Pharisees expertly interpreted the law to suit their own comforts. Quoting from Isaiah 29:13, Jesus condemned their hypocrisy (verses 6-7). Mark probably knew the Greek version of the Old Testament, for that is what he quoted, though not exactly. Isaiah's prophetic outburst must have been well known in the Christian community because Paul quoted Isaiah 13:14 in 1 Corinthians 1:19. True piety, Jesus said, means commitment from the heart totally dedicated to loving service of God and for others (verses 20-23). All of the evil intentions named here as defiling a person result in behaviour that is exactly opposite to the compassionate virtues he identified as the essence of the law. An attitude of loving God and neighbour more accurately represented the sense of communal justice and mutual well-being so characteristic of the great prophets of Israel. Neither they nor Jesus had any desire to abrogate the covenant law. Unlike the Pharisees, however, they did not regard legalistic minutiae as the be all and end all of faithfulness. Theirs was more generous, more compassionate morality which found its strength in a committed relationship to God expressed in thankful worship and service. This too should be our moral standard. The Pharisees were striving to be perfect but missed the mark for lack of love.

## **Psalm 45** *Eructavit cor meum* Grail Psalter

**℟ Your throne, O God, shall endure for ever.**

<sup>1</sup> *For the Choirmaster. Intoned like The Lilies" Of the sons of Korah. A Maskil. A Love Song.*

<sup>2</sup> My heart overflows with noble words.

To the king I must speak the song I have made,  
my tongue as nimble as the pen of a scribe. ℟

<sup>3</sup> You are the fairest of the children of men  
and graciousness is poured upon your lips:  
because God has blessed you for evermore. ℟

<sup>4</sup> O mighty one, gird your sword upon your thigh;  
in splendour and state, <sup>5</sup> ride on in triumph  
for the cause of truth and goodness and right. ℟

Take aim with your bow in your dread right hand.

<sup>6</sup> Your arrows are sharp, peoples fall beneath you.  
The foes of the king fall down and lose heart. ℟

<sup>7</sup> Your throne, O God, shall endure for ever.

A sceptre of justice is the sceptre of your kingdom.

<sup>8</sup> Your love is for justice; your hatred for evil. ℟

Therefore God, your God, has anointed you  
with the oil of gladness above other kings:

**✠ Your throne, O God, shall endure for ever.**

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Ghost;**

**As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.**

**COMMENT:** This Psalm is unusual in that it takes the form of an ode by a court poet for a royal marriage. Verse 1 makes it evident that this was the poet's intent. The superscription indicates that it was created by or for the Korahites, one of the families of Levitical priests from the Hebron area. In post-exilic times, they became one of the two great guilds of temple singers. Psalms 42, 44-49, 84-85 and 87-88 may have come from their hymn book. Despite frequent references to God, the content is more secular than religious. They refer specifically to a princess of a foreign country wedding the king of Israel. It may even have been the queen or a princess from Ophir, possibly in Arabia or East Africa (verse 9). The first few verses sing the praises of the king. Then the poet turns attention to the beautiful princess who is leaving her father's house (verse 10) for a new lord (verse 11). The wedding procession has already begun to make its way to the king's palace (verse 12b-15). For its final paean, the poet returns to the king whose marriage to this princess is for one purpose alone: to beget more heirs so that his dynasty will continue. As we have seen from the Davidic narratives in 2 Samuel, the times required the birthing of many sons. While we may react rather negatively to the traditional patriarchal attitudes of this psalm, we should not completely disregard its significance to the Hebrew tradition. Its inclusion in the Psalter may well have resulted from an allegorized interpretation. The Targum of this psalm, an Aramaic interpretative paraphrase from late pre-Christian times, treated it as an allegory of the marriage of the Messiah to his bride Israel. Early Christian interpreters also followed this approach as Revelation 22:17 appears to suggest, except that the bride in this latter instance is the Church.

### **Post Communion**

Lord God, the source of truth and love, keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, united in prayer and the breaking of bread, and one in joy and simplicity of heart, in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### **The Blessing**

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**