

August 20, 2023: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost~

“The Mouth Speaks things from the Heart.”

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com

Scripture Reading: Matthew 15 v 10-28

1. Introduction:

Many of us have experienced those moments where we wish we had pondered things over or talked it through with someone else before we said anything, right? We wished that we had not expressed something that hurt someone else. Sometimes our emotions take over, or we want to have an answer sooner than later about a situation, and when we say something about it without a deeper reflection, it does not always have the result we were looking for, and our words can hurt the other person. We then feel bad knowing that we could have said something differently. We also know that there are situations when people do not feel bad after speaking their mind. That is when conflicts may arise, and it is hard to bring peace and understanding.

2. The Mouth Speaks Things from the Heart:

In our passage Jesus’s words are addressed to the crowd, when He says in verse 11, “What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.” He said this after His conversation with the Pharisees where they challenged Him about clean and unclean practices in the Old Testament Laws. They questioned why the disciples did not wash their hands before they ate. The disciples were breaking the traditions of the elders, they told him. Their response got Jesus really upset and He called them hypocrites, because He felt they too broke the commands about not really honoring their mothers and fathers. Why expect others to obey the laws when you break them? Then, He tells them that Isaiah was right in Isaiah 29 v 13, *“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of Me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.”* Jesus called them blind guides, because they missed the way in understanding of what it means to be the people of God, says RT France in his

book on Matthew. Their influence on their followers will lead them all to fall into the same pit.

What is Christ saying to the crowd and to the Pharisees? He emphasized that the laws they are so used to following do not make them better people! Why focus on being so clean? Why focus on physical food. Look what happens to it! It goes into the mouth, and into the stomach and into the sewerage. What goes into the mouth is not the problem. The problem is, what comes out of the mouth, because what comes out of the mouth, comes from the heart! Jesus then goes on, saying, *“¹⁸ But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”*

In spiritual and moral terms, the heart is viewed as the seat of thought and will. The heart is the place of love and goodness and where our intentions are born. That’s where we think about what to say, and the place where we think about how to behave and act. It is a good place to think and plan good things, things of love and mercy and generosity. But the heart is also the place where we harbor negative thoughts and think and plan things that are morally wrong, and can hurt other people, loved ones, neighbors and more.

3. Conclusion:

So, while we are rightfully concerned about what we may have just said to someone, and wonder how to make it right, Christ is there to understand and forgive, but He is also taking it a step further, by challenging us about the way we are, our mindset, how we think about other people, how we behave. He is talking about patterns of thought, of behavior, and of actions in our lives. He is challenging us to examine our hearts, which is the place of our intentions. In our church, Jesus would certainly go around and check on us, what we say to one another, and how we act towards one another. In our positions of power, of decision making, He is especially interested in how we are, how we talk and act. May the Holy Spirit help each one of us to reflect on this message this morning, and this week. May God help us to clean up those parts of our heart that need some work. May God be our helper, our companion, and teach us God’s way, God’s heart. Amen.