

TEXT: Mark 7:1-5, 14-23

THEME: EVER THANKFUL HEARTS MADE NEW BY JESUS

It is a Monday night and you have to be at work bright and early tomorrow. For whatever reason, anxiety or late-night coffee, you cannot sleep. You decide to turn on the TV and start surfing. Soap opera rerun...nope. A Clint Eastwood movie nearly done...nope. A super-special cleaning product that can clean wine, blood, and dirt off white carpeting with no work...now we're talking!

Infomercials are all the same: The person on camera takes a white dress shirt and pours wine all over it. Then he sprays the problematic area with the cleaning marvel and—poof—it's like brand new. Your jaw drops in a mixture of amazement and skepticism. You know it is all smoke and mirrors, but you feel your hand inching towards the phone. Plus, if you act now, you will get the car scratch remover. It's a deal you cannot refuse.

Our Gospel text for this Thanksgiving service is like a glimpse into an ancient infomercial. The Pharisees had drawn a crowd and convinced people to buy into the idea that true cleanliness came from outward traditions like hand washing and food cleanliness. The Pharisees were pitching a wonder product—hand washing and eating ceremonially clean foods—that will make any dirty heart clean. In the Jewish culture of the time there were certain actions or foods that, unless done properly, would make someone unclean and unable to worship in the temple. To the Pharisees, either you made yourself clean and in good standing with God or you were unclean and outside of fellowship with God.

So our first-century infomercial continues, and enter Jesus, who spouts off a whole list of unclean things: **“For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean' (Mark 7:21-23).** Essentially, Jesus is pouring a garbage pit on the white carpeting and saying, “Can your wonder product clean all of these things, too?” Notice, Jesus talked about a clean heart. In the Jewish world of the time, the word heart had a different meaning than it does for us now. We think of the word heart as emotions, but to them it was emotions, thoughts, desires, guts...everything. It meant the very essence of a person. If your heart was unclean, you were unclean. The Pharisees were so hung up on having superficially clean hearts, that they neglected the evil things that were coming out of them and Jesus lets them know it.

Watching this first-century drama unfold is all well and good, except for one thing: Our hearts are full of all the evil things that Jesus addresses. We have anything but ever thankful hearts. Our hearts are ever full of envy and pride. Our hearts are ever full of disdain and bitterness. Jesus makes it clear that our hearts are unclean. Hand washing is out. How then can we become clean again? What will make our dirty hearts of stone into clean, ever thankful hearts, beating for God and neighbor?

Jesus gave an extensive diagnosis of our unclean hearts. Yet he also provides the cure—himself! Jesus is the only one that can give you a clean heart. This long list of unclean things that he speaks is saying: “Do not look to yourself to clean up your heart. This

miracle cleaner that the Pharisees are telling you about (and remember, there is a little bit of Pharisee in each of us) will do nothing for this list. Your sinful, unclean heart can be made into a new, ever thankful heart only through God's grace and mercy." Christ tells us all of our sins in this passage so that we have nowhere else to look but to him. And that is what we must do. The only place that we can turn for an ever thankful heart is Jesus. His death and resurrection were enough to supply all of creation with an ever thankful heart.

In a few moments, we will give some thank-offerings to our God, placing them on the altar. We've already placed harvest items on the Lord's altar, items for which we are very thankful. On the altar is a Bible, God's Word that tells us of God's forgiving love for us. Also on the altar are the sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion, through which our God gives us his forgiving love in tangible ways, ways that we can feel and taste. Our harvest altar is beautiful and bountiful—just like the gifts our God gives us. But in a moment, our thank-offerings will take the form of money—checks and cash. With that money, you could buy clothing, food, shelter, transportation, education, and recreation. An unclean heart will tell you not to place so much money in that offering plate. Save and use more of it for yourself. After all, you worked hard to earn that money; it's yours! An unclean heart will whisper that the church leaders just waste the money you give so hang onto it for yourself. An unclean heart will argue that since you cannot give as much money as others, why bother to give anything at all; your offering won't make any difference one way or another. Or an unclean heart might try to convince you to give even more money as a way to earn God's favor. My friends, unclean hearts—hearts damaged by sin—will always find a way to grudgingly give puny gifts to God.

Ever thankful hearts—made new by Jesus—see gifts to God in a different way. Ever thankful hearts see money, as well as our time and talents, as gifts from God. Ever thankful hearts return the best—the first—of those gifts back to God to show our love and gratitude for all that our Savior-God has graciously done for us. Ever thankful hearts use some of those gifts to care for ourselves and to pay our taxes. Ever thankful hearts see that some of those gifts from God are to be shared with others. Ever thankful hearts see all things new through a heart that has been made new by Christ's death and resurrection. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul put it so well in his second letter to the Corinthians: **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:17-21).**

As we celebrate Thanksgiving today and every day, let us celebrate the new heart—the ever thankful heart—that we Christians have received from Jesus. Amen.