

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**  
**Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost – September 2, 2018 – SUMMER of HEALING**  
**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**  
**Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23**

**FOR REFLECTION**

"There is no fixed physical reality, no single perception of the world, just numerous ways of interpreting world views as dictated by one's nervous system and the specific environment of our planetary existence."

~ Deepak Chopra, American Philosopher (b.1946)

**Healing Our Perceptions**

Ancient humans created a division of labor in the family out of necessity and caution. Men who were usually stronger left the home site and hunted. Women and children stayed closer to home, kept the gardens, cooked and maintained the home – and had access to safe shelter from predators. But in more civilized times, forcing women to only do housework, to keep them from getting an education and serve the men before eating themselves, made to stay out of the public eye, this is no longer a question of necessity or caution. This is exclusion and subjugation. Protection has been traded in for gender discrimination.

Ancient dietary laws intended to protect people have become purity restrictions which exclude people. Making sure a baby animal is not cooked in it's mother's milk was a compassionate idea. But forcing people to keep meat and milk separate to the point of having two sets of dishes excludes poor people who can't afford two sets of dishes and therefore can't keep kosher. Compassion has been lost.

These are just a couple of the challenging ideas that Jesus imparted through stories and behaviors. He was in the business of Culture Shift through Changing Perceptions. Just because a tradition or law started out with good intentions and positive outcomes – doesn't mean that tradition or law remains positive or helpful in a new time and context. And humans being what we are, born ego-centric with a will to survive, we need to check ourselves constantly – remind ourselves to consider the needs of others – and adjust the social contract accordingly.

Our text this morning is a theological argument – likely from a later time in the first century when Christian Jews were fighting with Orthodox Jews. Purity laws dictated that Jewish people wash their hands before eating. Ancient people may have figured out that eating after caring for animals or digging in the dirt could make you sick if you didn't wash up. On the other hand, if a person didn't always have access to water, should they go hungry on principle? Are unwashed hands defiled and an abomination

before G-d? Or are they an inconvenience and possible health risk to avoid IF POSSIBLE or at all costs?

Jesus was trying to get people to re-think their assumptions and take a reasonable step back from controlling other people's lives – especially less powerful people. Our lectionary people chopped up the text for this morning and left out some interesting tidbits. Verses 18-19 are a bit repetitive but make an important point:

18 He said to them, 'Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, 19 since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?' (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

First of all, the interpretation that all foods are declared clean is not necessarily true. What Jesus DOES seem to say is that the food we eat is neutral – it doesn't defile us – as defilement has to do with the heart – with one's intentions and behaviors. Digestion is a physical process and the waste produced by the process is expelled – it leaves us. But our actions – our lack of compassion, our self-absorption and desire for power over others – these are matters of the heart. These are the things that defile us and need to be expelled from our hearts along with a change in behavior.

For most humans, this takes conscious effort – a shift in thinking – a change in perception. And it involves seeing things from multiple perspectives.

*[Ask people to describe the room looking only at what is in front of them – get multiple angles.]*

A larger understanding of the room comes from multiple perspectives. Jesus told stories and had dinner parties with a vast variety of people in order to get people to see and understand more than their own point of view.

The Norton-Simon museum has several rooms of Impressionist artwork. It is art that insists on the viewer seeing things differently. Artists – painters, sculptors, actors, musicians, dancers, comedians, writers – artists are deeply invested in creating Culture Shift through Changing Perceptions. Scientists offer us photographs from space telescopes – along with photographs taken through microscopes – vastly expanding our environmental consciousness – changing the way we measure everything. Our best teachers don't tell us what to think – but teach us how to think from a variety of perspectives – offering multiple sources and examples – practicing dialogue and debate rather than rote memorization.

This week the nation has been remembering and mourning the loss of two famous people. Senator John McCain was a politician I heartily disagreed with – but a man I admired for his willingness to debate and argue and listen to various points of view. He was as appalled as we have been by our governmental polarization and unwillingness to work across the aisle. His memorials have been teaching moments beyond the grave – as he rejected our current choice of selfish/greedy leadership – and asked former presidents from both major parties – George W. Bush and Barack Obama – both of whom he had major disagreements – to provide the eulogies. John McCain, POW and statesman, impacted our understanding of what democracy is about.

And then there is Aretha Franklin – the “Queen of Soul” – the first female performer to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in **1987...**

According to David Remnick, what "distinguishes her is not merely the breadth of her catalogue or the cataract force of her vocal instrument; it's her musical intelligence, her way of singing behind the beat, of spraying a wash of notes over a single word or syllable, of constructing, moment by moment, the emotional power of a three-minute song. "Respect" is as precise an artifact as a Ming vase."

Describing Franklin's voice as a youngster on her first album, “Songs of Faith,” released in 1956 when she was just 14, Jerry Wexler explained that it "was not that of a child but rather of an ecstatic hierophant."

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aretha\\_Franklin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aretha_Franklin)

*A hierophant is a person who brings religious congregants into the presence of that which is deemed holy...an interpreter of sacred mysteries and arcane principles.*

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hierophant>

And – AND she was a powerful force for Civil Rights, Women's Rights and Native American Rights. She created Culture Shift through her art and public behavior. Aretha Franklin – a black woman born in 1944 in Mississippi – changed the way people think and act and experience the world.

Jeshua, Jewish kid born out of wedlock during the Roman occupation of Israel, continues to change the way we think and act and experience the world.

Every person in this room has a unique perspective and the potential to change our perceptions – forever.

G-d made each of us a gateway to inspiration and innovation – as different as we can be from the next person – for holy a purpose.

May our perceptions and our hearts be healed and strengthened for the work we must do in our own time and place.

### Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23 (NRSV)

1 Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, 2 they noticed that some of his disciples were eating [*“eating the loaves” recalling ch. 6 feeding the crowd*] with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. 3 (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; 4 and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) 5 So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

6 He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; 7 in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' 8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: **15 there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.**" ...**21 For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come:** fornication, theft, murder, 22 adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

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1987 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as the first female performer to be inducted

In December 2015, Franklin gave an acclaimed performance of "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" at the 2015 Kennedy Center Honors during the section for honoree Carole King, who co-wrote the song. During the bridge of the song, Franklin dropped her fur coat to the stage, for which the audience rewarded her with a mid-performance standing ovation. She returned to Detroit's Ford Field on Thanksgiving Day 2016 to once again perform the national anthem before the game between the Minnesota Vikings and Detroit Lions. Seated behind the piano, wearing a black fur coat and Lions stocking cap, Franklin gave a rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" that lasted more than four minutes and featured a host of improvisations.

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A hierophant (Ancient Greek: ἱεροφάντης) is a person who brings religious congregants into the presence of that which is deemed holy. The word comes from ancient Greece, where it was constructed from the combination of *ta hiera*, "the holy", and *phainein*, "to show" ...A hierophant is an interpreter of sacred mysteries and arcane principles.

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Narcisse-Virgile Diaz de la Pena, "The Approaching Storm" (1870)

