

Isaiah 29:11-19; Mark 7:1-13 (Ephesians 5:22-33) – *“You Turn Things Upside Down”*

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The use of a Collect/prayer, a Hymn of the Day, and a Sermon, which focus on a selection of readings from the Old and NT, are all good traditions which the Christian church established early on in its history (Acts 2:42; Ephesians 5:19) to keep us focused on God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and our lives as His people. Our focus today is the danger of bad traditions which can creep into the church and focus our attention on the word and works of man over and above the Word and works of God. Such bad traditions turn the Word of God *“upside down.”* Jesus spoke of these damaging traditions in our Gospel reading by quoting these words from our OT reading: *“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men..You turn things upside down!”*

These words certainly speak to God’s people of every age—sinful, *“upside down”* people whom God’s Holy Spirit seeks to turn us right side up through God’s Word, by giving us faith in the promised Savior, Jesus Christ. But since our sinful nature doesn’t like to be *“upside down”* and out of control of our lives, it continues to try to turn our faith in Jesus Christ *“upside down”* again, so that it can be back on top and in control. One telltale sign that our sinful nature is successful in regaining control of our lives is, as I mentioned last week, when we start to consider the things of this world as being more important than God and His gifts of eternal life, which He is here to give us. When such thinking starts to effect our behavior then we begin *“teaching as doctrines the commandments of men,”*—putting man’s word above the Word of God and turning everything *“upside down.”*

Do you remember what I’ve said in the past is the default religion of our sinful nature? Works-righteousness—the belief that I can save myself by what I do. When a person begins to believe such nonsense, everything they do is *“upside down”* and *“in vain,”* including their worship. God said, *“In vain do they worship me.”* It’s *“in vain”* since their worship of God, instead of being something they want to do because of all that God has done and continues to do for them through His Divine Service, it’s now a “good work” they feel they have to do to earn their salvation. Such worship is *“in vain,”* and earns them nothing but damnation.

All this works-righteous thinking comes from our sinful nature’s desire to want to be God—to want to be the one who’s on top and in charge. This, of course, is in direct opposition to the truth about God and man, which is why God says to sinful man: *“You turn things upside down!”* And when we turn the things of God upside down then we are not headed up to God but down to hell and leading others in the same direction (if they’re foolish enough to follow us).

Thankfully, in the midst of all this sinful thinking and teaching of man, God says: *“therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder;...In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.”* And by the time of our text from Mark, this promise of God had come to pass in the *“words of a book”* made flesh in Jesus Christ (John 1:14). The *“wonderful things”* God promised to do to open our eyes and ears of faith and keep them open were being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. At the time of our Gospel reading, Jesus was in the process of revealing His power to deliver us from all the effects of sin by healing people of their illnesses no matter how serious.

Why were the religious leaders of Jesus’ day not interested? Because they believed that their efforts to save themselves had not failed, therefore they had no need for the salvation which Jesus had come to give. They had established a set of additional laws and traditions, like washing their hands after coming into contact with anything spiritually unclean, to make sure that they were (in their minds) keeping God’s Laws.

But in reality their additional laws and traditions were doing just the opposite. They dumbed-down the Law of God, making it into something they could actually fulfill themselves. As a result, the main purpose of God's Law—to make it obvious to us that we are sinners in need of a Savior—was doing the complete opposite for these religious leaders. The Law for them was their savior—God's way of showing us how we can save ourselves. They had turned the things of God "*upside down!*"

To summarize this "*upside down*" thinking, I'm going to use an illustration I've used in the past. This "*upside down,*" works-righteous thinking is like the word ME because it's all about ME—what I can do to save ME. Hopefully we can see this same ME thinking in ourselves and in the world around us. If I don't believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior, then my salvation is up to ME—ME doing what's best for ME; to save ME. While such thinking may begin with ME doing my best to help others as a way of earning my salvation, the further I separate myself from God and His Word the more my ME thinking deteriorates into a total disregard for others if they get in the way of what I think is best for ME. Abortion is a good example of the how low this ME thinking can lead us.

Such ME thinking is, of course, completely upside down from the Word of God. God's Word could be summarized with the word WE (which is ME right-side up). By the word WE, I don't mean to suggest that we have anything to do with our salvation, but that God works to unite us to Himself as His family—the WE of the Church. WE belong together (Christ as the head of the Church and all of us as parts of His body).

Everything that Jesus did and continues to do is with WE in mind. His death on the cross in payment for our sins; His resurrection from the dead in victory over sin, death and the devil; and His coming to us today to create and sustain our saving faith in Him through His Word and Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. He works to reunite us. Not just Him and Me, but Him and We. The WE of His family, the Church.

This Good News is what turns our lives right-side up again, raising us up from hell to heaven, from death to life, and giving our lives a whole new meaning and direction. We're not here on this earth to do good things in order to earn our salvation. Since we are already saved through our faith in Jesus Christ, we're free to serve others with the gifts God has graciously given us, especially the Good News of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

In our Epistle reading, did you notice what the wife and husband in a Christ centered marriage focus on? Not on how their spouse can serve their needs, but on how they can serve their spouse's needs; "*submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ*" (Ephesians 5:21). When God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit graciously gives us all we need and more, our selfish focus on ME is turned upside down (or should I say right-side up) to WE—to our lives together in Christ and in service to each other.

[Children's Sermon] This morning I've been talking about what happens whenever we disobey God. Another name for disobeying God is sin. Whenever we disobey God or sin, we're doing what the devil wants us to do. Through our sins, the devil takes us captive (like these handcuffs), and he wants to drag us down to hell, separated from God.

If you were handcuffed like this, what's the first thing you want to do? Break free! Are you strong enough to break free from your sins and the devil? No. That's why God the Father sent His Son, Jesus.

Because Jesus is not only a man like you and me, but also God, like God His Father, He is strong enough to set us free from our sins, and death in hell with the devil. How did He set us free from our sins so that the devil doesn't drag us into hell with him? He died on the cross and went to hell in our place. But when Jesus goes to hell, is the devil able to keep Jesus there? No. Jesus cuts us free from our sins, death and the devil [use large scissors to cut ribbon] so that we can live forever with God in heaven.

But before we go to heaven, now that we are set free from our sins, death and the devil, what are we free to do? To set other people free from their sins, death and the devil by telling them all about what Jesus has done for them.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.