

All the Bacon!  
Mark 7:1-8, 14-15  
Colebrook Congregational Church  
August 30, 2015 / Ordinary 22

I saw a picture a while back, and I have been having trouble trying to find it again. It annoys me, because I think about it whenever Jesus teaches this lesson. It is a black & white photograph of a young Hasidic Jewish boy in an outdoor setting, and he is eating an aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, but it is made out of bacon.

The most obvious, the most visible difference between us and our Abrahamic cousins, can be represented by bacon. Bacon is very tasty, and as such is added to many things, and is all over our culture. Little Caesars has added it to their lunch special, wrapping the outside of the crust with it...you don't even have the choice if you want it or not! During my vacation week last month, many of you know that I worked at the ConnectiCon Convention. I stayed at a hotel that had a waffle maker, and in my tiredness, I poured some waffle mix onto the machine, added a bunch of bacon, then added the rest. My fellow con-goers who saw this went a bit nuts. All over social media, there are pictures of creative ways to prepare and partake of this very not kosher food.

What is kosher? We see it in the grocery stores, there are even kosher sections, and also on many items, there is a symbol with the word pareve on it. Can you imagine going through life in this country if you observe kosher rules? The closest I can associate it with is if someone has a food allergy, and you have to go through every ingredient, checking to make sure something doesn't have nuts, or gluten, or other things. It's close, but people with allergies have to do this to survive, while kosher observation is a choice.

Observing kosher rules is at the heart of the conflict here between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jews have many rules about holiness and purity which have set them apart from those around them for millenia. And that was on purpose.

The world of food is divided into clean and unclean, and then the clean are divided into meat, dairy, and neutral, which is that pareve symbol you see on

things. You cannot mix the meat and dairy, so cheeseburgers are out. And then there are rules about preparation. There are lots of rituals dealing with bathing and washing, making themselves pure and clean, and if they are not followed, that makes whatever was prepared, during the eating or the consuming, unclean. Eating is seen as a religious act, so the forms must be followed.

That is why the Pharisees are reacting as they do in this situation. And I am sure most of us can see their point. What is something that our parents told us growing up before sitting down for a meal? Go wash your hands! But in this case, Jesus is trying to make a theological point.

Under kosher laws, your body and soul is defiled by what goes into your mouth and consumed. Jesus is telling us that it is not what goes into our body, but what comes out of it, and that is the center of the lesson Jesus is teaching us. Defilement comes from what we say and do. If we are mean to others, we defile ourselves. If we harm an other, we defile ourselves. If we eat bacon, we are okay; but if we didn't bring enough to share, we defile ourselves.

Back in college when I was with the newspaper dealing with censorship issues, this guy, bigger than me, showed up at my dorm room. I knew him, and I knew he did not normally drop in on people. He handed me a comic book, telling me to read it. I thanked him, and explained that I was not interested in comic books. He replied, "No, read it. Trust me. We'll talk later," and then he turned and left without another word. Well, I read it, and I was hooked on the story. It was called Transmetropolitan, and I later learned that this graphic novel is considered one of the best ever made. It had a dream team of writer, illustrator, & inker. The main character, outlaw journalist Spider Jerusalem, was based on famed gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson, writer of Fear & Loathing in Las Vegas, and the story dealt with censorship issues in a sprawling metropolis in the near future.

There is a flashback scene during the story, where the protagonist remembers an incident from his past where he was in France covering a conflict over languages. He meets with his source in the French government and they talk

about the characteristics of the English language. Spider is about to leave, and he shakes the hand of the source, and apologizes that he lost, that French will no longer be the language of France. He responds, "So am I. English is an ugly, lurching fool of a language." Spider replies, "But it communicates hate well." The source retorts, "That is nothing to be proud of."

They're both right. Our language, being a hodgepodge of many other languages, communicates hate very well and quite colorfully. Especially with adjectives, adverbs, and conjugations. But that is not something we should be proud of. It may make it easier for us to defile ourselves with what comes out of us.

When I was younger, I would get angry a lot; and I would respond angrily to things. A lot of times, I would feel better immediately after responding in an unkind way, but later, I would always regret it. I would wish that I hadn't said whatever it was that I said. I would feel that I had defiled myself, like how Jesus warns us against doing.

It is hard to always respond kindly, especially in the face of adversity. Ask anyone who has worked in retail or customer service. Our natural instinct is to defend ourselves, to fight back. Sometimes, it is just easier to lash out. But we must always be on our guard, remembering what Jesus has taught us; that it is not what goes into us that defiles us, but what comes out; so that what does come out from us is clean, is kosher, and is rooted in our faithful love.

Amen.

## Pastoral Prayer

[PAUSE]

O God, we hold up the needs of our neighbors as dear to us as our own needs. Loving our neighbors as ourselves, we offer to You our thanksgivings and our petitions on behalf of our church, our community, and the world.

We thank You for Your blessings, and for the lessons You teach us. We thank You for those You have sent to help us in our daily lives. And we thank You for the opportunities to serve You through serving others, seeing to their needs.

We pray for the forgiveness of our missteps. We pray for your guidance to live our lives in more loving ways.

We pray for those who are unwell of mind, of body, or of spirit. We pray for their recovery, we pray for their caregivers, and we pray that you move us to help them in any way our gifts allow. We pray for those who are lost, so that they may find guidance. We pray for those who protect us, please keep them safe as they have kept us safe. And we pray that you help us to be instruments of your divine love.

We especially pray for:

Hear our prayers, both spoken and unspoken, you know the prayers of our hearts. And free us from the grip of distractions, that we may be of service to others in your name in our lives. Amen

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15

7:1 Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him,

7:2 they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them.

7:3 (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders;

7:4 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.)

7:5 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?"

7:6 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;

7:7 in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

7:8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

7:14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand:

7:15 there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."