

Sermon Draft

Text: Mark 7:1–13

Sermon: True Hearts

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has been the source for our text these past several weeks but today I would like us to consider our Gospel in which Jesus quotes verse 13 of Our Old Testament reading from Isaiah 29: *“This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men.”* You've heard the term lip service, now you know where it came from or at least many feel this is where it got its origin.

In today's Gospel, these words from Isaiah are applied by the Lord Jesus to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who, as Jesus says, *“leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men”* (Mark 7:8).

Have you ever gone to the store because you'd seen an advertisement in the paper that said it was selling exactly what you wanted? When you got to the store, however, you couldn't find what you were looking for, so you asked one of the clerks and he replied, “We don't have any.

We never had any.” “But, they were in your ad in the paper this morning.” “Well, sir, just because we had them in our ad doesn’t necessarily mean we have them in the store.” Silly you, believing that if a store advertises it sells a certain product, it will in fact actually carry that product in the store!

God has the same kind of expectation when he looks into our hearts. God desires that the faith we profess and practice will in fact be the same faith he finds inside us. More than just what we advertise on the outside, God desires that our hearts belong to Him.

Too often, what God finds is that we are guilty of false advertising with hearts far from him. That is certainly what Jesus found in the scribes and Pharisees who came to him from Jerusalem. They believe that in his ignoring “*the tradition of the elders,*” they have found a way to discredit him (vs 1–5). But Jesus actually uses their abuse of those traditions to unmask their hypocrisy.

Their hypocrisy is that they use their profession of love for God as a mask to excuse or hide the evil they harbor in their hearts (vs 6–8). As an example of their hypocrisy, the Lord points to their use of the traditions to allow them to circumvent the Fourth Commandment (vs 9–13). When our profession of faith and outward works are not matched by a heart of faith, that's spiritual false advertising.

When we do and say all the right religious things because that's what we're supposed to do, or simply because our parents make us, or our spouse wants us to, or as a mask behind which to hide sinful behavior, we are guilty of honoring God with our lips, while our hearts are far from him.

A young woman told her pastor about her grandfather. Everyone in the small town where they grew up thought very highly of him. After all, he had donated the land for their church and the money for building the church. People thought so much of him that they named the church after him. Everyone thought of him as a very religious, godly man—everyone, that is, except his family.

For them, his “acts of faith” were just a mask behind which he hid the truth. They knew him to be a mean, verbally and physically abusive father and grandfather.

If we are just going through the motions, if we are just doing all the right things because that’s what we’re supposed to do or because that’s what everyone expects, if we’re here to put on a show or to hide from everyone an empty heart or an ungodly life, then please know this: We may fool others; we may even fool ourselves, but God is not fooled. He sees right through you and me. He is not satisfied with a faith that is just lip service (Mark 7:6). He wants our hearts to belong to him!

God so desires that our hearts belong to him that he gave his own Son. The pages of Holy Scripture record for us how our God does more than just pay lip service to his desire to restore the world to himself. The lips of God’s prophets—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, John the Baptist—announced again and again God’s promise to give the world a Savior from sin and death.

But the Holy Scriptures also record for us the story of all God actually did in order to keep his promises—preserving his people through the flood, the Red Sea, from the Philistines, from Babylon. Our God didn't just make promises; he kept them all, finally, by giving his own Son. God gave his Son to die. That was no lip service; that tore out the Father's very heart! And Christ went willingly to the cross. All his words of teaching he backed up with that action of deepest, heartfelt love.

In the Sacraments, the God who loves the world that much acts in our lives to make clear that his love includes you and me. In Holy Baptism, he has called us each by name and adopted us as his own sons and daughters. In the gift of his Son's body and blood, in, with, and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion, he makes clear that his love for us is more than just a promise; that's the very body and blood given on the cross, and they are given to each of us personally!

In doing all this, the Lord strips away our hypocrisy so that our hearts do become his. He strips away the mask of hypocrisy from the religious leaders in the text because he desires that they turn from their ways and be forgiven.

Do you remember the story of King David? After he committed adultery, David went to great lengths, even murder, to cover up what he had done. Then he went right back to living a very religious life as he always had. Yet now it was only a mask used to hide his guilt. God loved David too much for that. That's why he sent the prophet Nathan to confront David with his sin. God wanted David's heart. God wanted David's faith to be real again, so he stripped away David's mask. He confronted David, so David would confess his sin. He confronted David because he wanted David to know that he forgave him. God loves you and me too much to allow us to continue to wear our faith as nothing more than a mask to hide our hypocrisy.

Through his word of Law, he strips away our masks, because more than anything he desires to speak to us his word of forgiveness and grace. He acts in our lives because in the place of an empty shell of religion he desires to give us hearts that belong to him!

There's no false advertising with God. What you see is what you get. What we see—made clearly visible in the life and death of Jesus—is a heart of love that wouldn't let us go our empty way. And what we get then is that loving heart for all eternity, his loving heart made our loving heart.

Amen