

Teachers notes

Please note that this document contains 3 different versions of the "Exploring the Word" worksheet. Each version contains the same Gospel texts, Reflection and questions, but with a different configuration of "alternative views".

activities

- ★ Develop a clear definition of 'hypocrisy' by identifying examples, non-examples and characteristics of hypocrisy.
- ★ Create a poster or PowerPoint presentation that depicts the external forces on young people today that encourage them to act out of the 'things within'. Suggest ways young people might strengthen themselves against such influences.
- ★ Use symbols, images or words to recall a time when your actions were a reflection of the 'things within' and you may have damaged your opinion of yourself or your relationship with another person. Use creative visualisation to replay the event in your mind and explore more positive responses to the situation.



Why was eating with unclean hands such an issue for the Pharisees?

What effect is achieved by Jesus answering the Pharisees with a quote from Isaiah?

What point was Jesus making to the crowd about the source of cleanliness and uncleanness?

What does this passage say about personal responsibility?

How is it possible to turn around or reduce the 'things within' that encourage wrong-doing?



gospel Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and the Jews in general, follow the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; and on returning from the market place they never eat without first sprinkling themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. So these Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?' He answered, 'It was of you hypocrites that Isaiah so rightly prophesied in this passage of scripture:

This people honours me with lip-service,
while their hearts are far from me.
The worship they offer me is
worthless,
the doctrines they teach are only
human regulations.
You put aside the commandment of
God to cling to human traditions.'

He called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him unclean; it is the things that come out of a man that make him unclean. For it is from within, from men's hearts, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a man unclean.'

reflection REFLECTION

No matter how good the intention, sometimes misguided principles can lead to false action. This is what Jesus chastised the Pharisees about. The traditions that had been established through the Pharisees and the Lawyers were certainly based on the Law as stated in the Torah. However, the practices that had been established to try to help people honour the Torah had effectively replaced the Law. In order to maintain spiritual cleanliness, a tradition of physical cleanliness had emerged – particularly around interaction with Gentiles and around eating. However, the purpose of the tradition had become lost. The need for physical cleanliness had replaced the maintenance of spiritual cleanliness.

The Pharisees observe some of the disciples eating without properly washing their hands and challenge Jesus about it. They are upholding the tradition that has effectively become the Law. Jesus reminds them – somewhat forcefully – that these external practices are not the Law; rather the Law is observed internally. Jesus goes so far as to call the Pharisees hypocrites. It is a criticism of them that the gospel writers attribute to Jesus quite frequently. For Jesus, hypocrisy was one of the greatest failings. Because Jesus placed such a high price on integrity of word and action he could not abide those who proclaimed to be just, pious or forgiving and yet acted in ways that were contrary to these claims. His chastisement of the Pharisees – calling them hypocrites – was a challenge to their observation of external practices and rituals instead of seeking to understand the Torah as a call to a change of heart. Jesus points out that no amount of ritual cleansing will make a person clean within. Similarly, evil and uncleanness come from within a person – one doesn't 'catch it' from contact with strangers.

scriptural CONTEXT

Mark's Audience

It is widely believed that the Gospel of Mark was written for a predominantly Greek-speaking, Gentile audience. Today's gospel passage is a perfect example of literary evidence that has been used to establish this position. The gospel writer clearly explains the Jewish practice of washing to the elbows before eating and ritual cleansing upon return from the marketplace where they would have encountered Gentiles. Obviously, a Jewish audience would not need this explanation. This practice of looking for information about the author and their audience within the text itself is a form of Literary Criticism.

Historical CONTEXT

Pharisees

Pharisees were mostly lay men (i.e. generally not Priests) who were characterised by a strict observance of the Torah as well as an oral tradition of teaching and interpretation. They believed that the Torah required interpretation – by engaging in this interpretation they participated in God's ongoing revelation. They also had a strong belief that all Jewish people were called to be a priestly people. This belief naturally put them at odds with the Priests of the Temple. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the teachings of the Pharisees gained prominence and eventually developed into Rabbinic Judaism that continues today.

- ❏ Why was eating with unclean hands such an issue for the Pharisees?
- ❏ What effect is achieved by Jesus answering the Pharisees with a quote from Isaiah?
- ❏ What point was Jesus making to the crowd about the source of cleanliness and uncleanness?
- ❏ What does this passage say about personal responsibility?
- ❏ How is it possible to turn around or reduce the 'things within' that encourage wrong-doing?



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This people honours me with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. The worship they offer me is worthless, the doctrines they teach are only human regulations. You put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions.'

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REFLECTION

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gospel focus

The things within

We live in a culture that is very quick to lay blame on external factors; some people are very reluctant to accept responsibility for their own actions and look for opportunities to distance themselves from feelings of guilt or even regret. Jesus makes it very clear that evil intentions – the things that make a person 'unclean' – actually come from within. He presents a confronting list of the things that come from within and we may be able to add others relevant to our own time. In our culture of no personal responsibility, Jesus challenges us to rethink just where the buck does stop.

- Q Why was eating with unclean hands such an issue for the Pharisees?
- Q What effect is achieved by Jesus answering the Pharisees with a quote from Isaiah?
- Q What point was Jesus making to the crowd about the source of cleanliness and uncleanness?
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