

Sermon August 29th, 2021

God's Holiness

The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees intensifies when the disciples do not clean their hands before eating. Now, from our viewpoint, it might look like the Pharisees are making a big deal out of nothing. How many times have we neglected to wash our hands before eating? **(Image)** Despite what health professionals tell us. But, from the Pharisees point of view, all acts of ritual cleansing are important in sanctifying life. All acts of ritual cleansing are important in giving us access to God's holy presence.

On the flip side, Jesus and his disciples believe that what sanctifies life is Jesus. What gives us access to God's holiness is Jesus **(Image)**. Or in other words, when we live like Jesus. When we stand in the presence of Jesus. We are standing in the presence of God's holiness.

When we start to understand both the Pharisees and Jesus' arguments, we see a fundamental disagreement between them on what they believe about how and where we experience God's holiness. This is one reason to explain the escalating tension between Jesus and the religious leadership.

In the life of the church, we have had fundamental disagreements over issues that have led to conflict, and in some cases, division. Communion **(Image)**, worship styles, music, who is welcome in the church, to name a few. Some of these issues we may see as insignificant, and were surprised that these issues divided the church. But at the time they wrestled over these issues, both sides saw their position as significant in determining someone's access to the holiness of God. They saw their position as the way God sanctifies someone's life. Or in other words, they saw their position as the pathway to salvation.

In our relationships, we can get into disagreements over things. Some issues are not as big as we make them out to be, and we are left wondering why our argument became so heated. Other issues are major for one person, but maybe not so major for the other. That's why it is never a good idea to down play the issue since it might be very important to your loved one. Then there are those issues we have disagreements over that are fundamental to the survival of our relationship. For example, how many children are we going to have? Or, do we share similar values? Or, how do we manage money? Or, are we honest with each other? Or, do we get along with each others' families, friends **(Image)**?

We get into disagreements all the time. Sometimes over fundamentals. Sometimes over issues that shouldn't be causing us so much grief. In the case of Jesus and the Pharisees this disagreement is over a fundamental understanding of who/what sanctifies life. Is it the Torah and the acts of ritual cleansing or is it Jesus and his movement?

In response to the fundamental difference between Jesus and the Pharisees, Jesus reminds them of the common ground they share. They both are trying to connect people to the Holiness of God. They both want to sanctify all life.

They both have a system in place that encourages people to live in ways that welcome God's holy presence.

Jesus points us to the fact that it is what is in us that can defile us. For the Pharisees they use ritual cleansing as a way of cleansing people from the sinful desires within them. For Jesus, he uses himself to cleanse the people he encounters.

Jesus recognizes their common ground, and uses it to show the Pharisees that though Jesus is challenging the Torah, Jesus' ultimate goal is the same. To invite people into the presence of God's holiness.

In the life of the church, we are invited to find the common ground we stand on and build bridges of unity. Yes, we might practice communion in different ways. We might have a different understanding of the meaning of communion. But, we all value communion, and believe it is an important practice in the church that connects us to the Holiness of God.

Yes, we might dance around in the aisles, or we might sit and stand in reverent quietness. But we still all come to worship God. To stand in the presence of God's holiness.

Yes, sometimes we disagree on how far Jesus' hospitality reaches. But, fundamental to Christianity is to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. Meaning, we are always wondering how we can create more access to God's holiness for people.

In interfaith circles it is our common goal to create a society that is peaceful and harmonious. Even though we come with very different perspectives on God and how people are to live as faithful believers. Despite these differences, we do find ourselves standing on this common ground called loving one's neighbor (**Image**). This common ground helps us put our differences aside, and drives us to do things together to reflect God's love in our community.

In the midst of disagreements, even fundamental ones, we stand on common ground. Sometimes, we need to work really hard to find that common ground. But, amongst all

the clouds of disagreement we find a ground to stand on **(Image)**. A ground that Jesus points out to us as we try to create a world where all life is sanctified. Where God's holiness is present everywhere. Where we live together in peace and harmony.

Let us pray, gracious God, we pray for patience, understanding, and grace as we dialogue with others about contentious issues in our world and in our relationships with loved ones. Open our eyes to see where you are paving common ground beneath the cloudy disagreements and conflicts we experience. So, that we all can stand in your holy presence. Sanctifying life with your love. **Amen.**

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