

[MUSIC PLAYING] Welcome to worship.

Interesting to me that on Labor Day, our gospel text talks about tradition.

And I'm hoping today that maybe we can differentiate between conventions, which are things we do because we like them, versus small T traditions, which are things we have inherited that probably have a good purpose, and capital T traditions.

Those are the big ones that you hang onto and you want to pass on, which is what traditions literally are, the thing you receive and that you pass on.

Some of you are wearing white today.

Will you wear white after Monday?

Coco Chanel says, go for it.

I googled that.

But you know why that tradition came about?

This is fun.

US Civil War, post-Civil War, new people making money as the Industrial Revolution came about.

And the high society, the people with the old money, decided there's a good way to draw a line between themselves and them, bless their hearts.

Go to the opera.

Why don't you dare?

Wearing white after Labor Day.

Yeah.

Or have your sleeve length run.

Terrible.

Fun fact, opera was originally designed for the working and the peasant class.

It was considered lowbrow entertainment, but that's just fun.

There are other traditions, right?

Watching the Jerry Lewis telethon, maybe.

Closing up the cottage, pulling in the dock.

But the traditions we talk about today go back a lot further, and they do three things.

And the good news about this is this is most of the sermon.

I'm just going to illustrate when I get there.

Tradition with a capital T.

As I'm working this out in my head, there are three important features.

First, we inherit stories of God's faithfulness.

Second, our traditions are meant for the common good.

And third, they are meant to move us forward into an uncertain future.

And the future has always been uncertain.

So there you are.

As we begin today, there are a couple of things I'm going to do messing with the bulletin.

We are going to do the order of confession and forgiveness.

The page number is actually page 94.

So bear that in mind.

And the other is the gospel acclamation.

I think that number is page 205 rather than what we have listed there.

So hopefully that will help.

There is a convention that when a visiting musician comes, you welcome them.

And I almost got past that because I was so fixated on page numbers and stuff and tradition and stuff.

But Sheila, we are glad you're here.

Thank you for leading us this morning.

Ordinarily, Sheila is with us at First Lutheran Port Colbert and often gets invited to be in other congregations.

So being in two places on a Sunday morning is not strange to you, but we're glad you're here.

Next week at the Anglican.

[LAUGHTER] [MUSIC PLAYING]

The Holy Gospel, according to Mark, the seventh chapter.

[INAUDIBLE] Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes had come from Jerusalem, they gathered around Jesus and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them.

For the Pharisees and many among the Jews do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders.

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 and pots and bronze kettles.

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?

And Jesus 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.

In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.

You abandon the commandment of God to hold a human tradition.

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, listen to me all of you and understand there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the

things that come out or what defile, for it is from within, from the human heart, that human, that evil intentions come.

Fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly, all of these evil things come from within.

And they defile a person, the gospel of our Lord.

[Sermon]

Grace and peace to you from God whose will it is to liberate and restore in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It would be interesting to know where your thoughts went as you heard this scripture read.

Did you like the laundry list?

Are you hoping the pastor will pick one and really just go after it?

Sorry, not going to happen.

But I think it is important to look at the heart of the matter, even how it is that we develop and define tradition, how it is that we carry it out, and how sometimes we use it as a cudgel to beat up on somebody else, or maybe just to draw a line in the sand.

And curiously, when we draw that line, we're always on the proper side.

How does that happen?

Don't know.

Well, I do, but it comes from the heart.

Jesus does not take the debate when people ask about these traditions.

And maybe you can help me check this out, but at least according to one scholar, nowhere in the Bible, in the Hebrew scriptures, does it say that we have to wash our hands or our dishes.

Ah, good.

I don't have to worry about that anymore.

No, I'll take care of that.

It's a good idea.

But Jesus' point is, he knows the end game for the religious establishment.

They want to brand him as lawless, and you know what happens to the lawless.

Yeah.

And that's the stuff that comes from the human heart.

And so does tradition, in some ways, at least the ways that we mess with it, whether it's shaming people because they dare wear white after Labor Day, or we find other traditions.

That says more about us than the people who transgress against tradition, I think.

So good tradition, like good religion, is maybe right out of the book of James.

Care for the widow and orphan, and keep yourself at least an arms length from a world system that acts like the pyramid, where there are always people on top that we venerate and people on the bottom that we shame.

That's what it means to be unspotted from the world.

Now, our man Martin Luther would be a little nervous about me talking about the book of James.

He was kind of hoping that we could not have it in the Bible because he was a little worried we'd get carried away and think that somehow our good works are the thing that earns favor with God.

We're still a little nervous about that, as Lutherans.

But it's that same guy who reminds us that it's not God who needs our good works, but it's our neighbor.

And that seems to me to be a good capital T tradition, one in which God's faithfulness in the past has been demonstrated that it is for the common good and that it moves us into an uncertain future.

That's the good kind of tradition, and I think we'll leave the others behind and

pursue that just a little bit.

How I spent part of my summer vacation.

I was curious about that political convention that was televised in the US.

And I was quite taken by one of the speakers, because he's one who frequently would appear at the Festival of Homiletics, either online or in person.

The Reverend Dr.

Rafael Warnock, now a senator from the US state of Georgia.

I think he playfully touched on something that I hope we caught, that it's really easy to cherry pick parts of scripture and parts of tradition to make ourselves right in somebody else wrong, or to justify us when we're out to lunch.

Sad but true.

So he opens his salvo by saying, you like your Bible?

How about some of this?

And he quotes from significant passages of scripture that really do, I think, fit the bill for tradition.

I'm going to take them out of the order that he presented them.

And maybe we'll see why in just a second.

For those of you who like your traditions old, here it goes.

A couple thousand years ago, Jesus says, whatever you do to the least of these, my sisters and brothers, it's like you do it for me.

And if that's too newfangled for you, we'll back up 800 years to the prophet Micah, whom the good preacher quoted.

And what is it that God requires of us in an age of injustice, but to do justice, to love kindness, which is all about relationships, and to walk attentively before God?

It seems to me that God's faithfulness would be reflected in a tradition like that one, that it is certainly for the common good, and certainly it could bring us into whatever the future has in store.

But maybe that's a little too recent for you.

How about Moses?

You want to go back that far?

I'm not sure I can go back much farther.

When Moses received the law, and it was spoken and recited and learned at the heart of the law, the Shema, here, O Israel, that you should love the Lord your God with all of your hearts, all of your mind, all of your soul, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

How about that for capital T tradition?

And none of this is done to impress God.

This is done for the sake of ourselves and those around us.

Consider the words from Deuteronomy.

Consider the words we first heard read today.

People might see a community that is so distinct and different from Pharaoh's Egypt or our contemporary society, where we still play the pyramid scheme, a place where grace might abound, where people do love justice.

They walk attentively before God.

They love their neighbors or selves.

Something like that could potentially be so very attractive.

People want a whiff of that kind of grace, don't they?

There are probably a lot of traditions in St.

Matthew's, but there's one that I've noticed.

It's loving the neighborhood.

I've been hanging out this summer with a few people from the congregation who are part of a revitalization team.

You might have heard some about that.

Coming up with ideas that we all shared together earlier in the spring, trying to develop these ways of reaching out to the neighbor.

I think that's really good capital T tradition going on there.

We love because God first loved us.

God is faithful.

It is certainly for the common good.

And we don't know our future.

But loving your neighbor seems like a good way to walk into it, whether it is a future that means more people in our congregation or whether it does not.

Capital T tradition.

Capital T tradition.

It's the good stuff that we've been handed.

It's the good stuff that we live with.

And it is the good stuff that, like with any good and hallow tradition, we pass on.

Amen.

Amen. .

[MUSIC - "SINGLE SANA"] (SINGING) Give me your little one and be good to me.

Give me your little one and my friend.

Give me your little one and my friend.

Give me your little one and my friend.

Single sana, single sana.

♪ Stables at a stable far ♪ ♪ Stables of our childhood ♪ Now give me joy in my heart.

♪ Give me joy in my heart, give me joy in my heart ♪ ♪ Give me joy in my heart, give me joy in my heart ♪ ♪ Give me joy in my heart, give me joy in my heart ♪ ♪ Give me happiness and a friend ♪ ♪ Stables at a stable far ♪ [MUSIC]