

Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Alison Heal on Sunday 16th August 2026

Bible passage: Matthew 15:1-20

Last week - how we picture Jesus, -Biblically accurate understanding - looks at us with love, reaches out to us in our distress.

This week – different side. Quite sharp, hypocrites!

Hypocrite –Says one thing, does another. wears a mask. All of us. Knowing it, acknowledging it...

Hypocrisy here by educated, politically/spiritually motivated elite group, Pharisees. They complained he and disciples eating with ritually defiled hands. Look how Jesus replies to them, knowing Ten Commandments will help

Do 10 commandments include ritual hand washing? (Ritual goes further than hygiene rules)

Does Torah (first 5 books, the Jewish Way given by God) include it?

Can see why Jesus felt free to 'break the tradition of the elders'. Wasn't in his Bible. From well-respected traditions, had provided a lot of good to Jewish believers, but wasn't foundational.

What is foundational? – 10 Commandments. Pharisees challenged Jesus about breaking a tradition, he turned it round on them. Break a commandment!

Root of the problem, Isaiah's words:

Honour with lips, hearts far from me = Worship in vain

Also, teaching human ideas as of same value as God's word

Anyone feel sorry for Pharisees?

That's fair enough. They want to love and serve God by doing things the way they've always done them. Having that turned upside down hurts.

Some of you come into church and see the new layout and the chairs coming into their own, and love it, and others come in and mourn something which has been very dear to them. Which is why we're keeping some pews along with chairs – people differ and we connect to God in different ways. Living well with our differences important here at All Saints.

Pharisees, different case – beyond holding onto traditions which helped them. Blaming Jesus for not doing the same, in one case neglecting God's rule for a rule of their own devising. Hypocrites!

After encounter with Pharisees, Jesus calls crowd. Crowd must have been pretty fascinated by the disagreement. Largely, loved Jesus, felt looked down on by Pharisees, so probably on his side, very curious to know how disagreement would work out.

What he said to crowd seems determined to provoke Pharisees, as disciples point out. He calls into question an understanding of the Jewish food rules. These are in Torah (not 10 commandments). He's not telling people to ignore them, at least in this account by Matthew.

But *is* getting them to think about what counts to God, outward expressions of faith or the inward drift towards, or away from God's goodness and love.

For the Jews, the most visible difference which God gave them to set them apart from other nations might be their food rules. For Christians in Luxembourg, visible difference might be how we spend our Sundays, church instead of sports or leisure or a lie-in.

Jesus isn't saying, scrap the food rules, take the Sunday lie-in. He's saying, as you follow your faith traditions, what's the direction of your heart?

List of evil intentions, from heart, which defile far more than failing to wash your hands. Recognise many 10 commandments?

6. You shall not murder.		
7. You shall not commit adultery.		
8. You shall not steal.		
9. You shall not bear false witness.		
10. You shall not covet.		

"Out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."



Need to take this list seriously, as with 10 commandments. Tendency to think rules are old hat, a free modern person follows their heart.

Exactly what Jesus is saying! Where is your heart going?

My heart can tend towards God's love, or it can lean into its natural anger – perhaps the origin of many murders

Our hearts can rest in God's sufficiency, or we can lean into the 'I deserve this' which can lead to adultery or sexual activity which harms ourselves or others.

The heart can love neighbours as it loves itself, or it can look at what they have and become jealous, leading to theft or telling lies for hurt or gain.

Our hearts aren't very reliable. They can drift one way, or the other. We know this.

Paraphrasing St Paul here: "Wretched people that we are! Who will rescue us from our fickle hearts? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Jesus was talking to Pharisees and ordinary people who had to try to manage their own hearts according to the Torah guide God had given them. Thanks be to God, that we are facing this problem of the fickle heart on the other side of Jesus' death and resurrection, in the time when God gives the Holy Spirit to all who call on him!

Because the problem of the fickle heart isn't solved through rules, human or even God-given. The problem of our fickle hearts is resolved by turning to Christ as Lord, repenting and submitting our lives to him, and receiving his Holy Spirit, not just once, but on a daily basis.

For all those of you who have accepted Jesus' Lordship over your life, you have a Helper, the Holy Spirit Jesus promised. We have these huge advantages in the battle with our wayward hearts, that neither the Pharisees nor the crowd had.

We have Jesus our Saviour, died to take our sins away, risen and destroying death.

And we have the presence of God's Holy Spirit, not only near us, but in us, to guide our hearts to him in all the decisions and emotions of life.

Jesus quoted the old prophecy: "their hearts are far from me, in vain to they worship me."

Thanks to Jesus, our hearts are drawn to him, and with his Holy Spirit at work in us, we begin to honour him not only with our lips, but with our lives and with our hearts.