

Devotion, Week of JULY 21, 2024
Rev. Jeanne Simpson

This past Sunday I preached about contamination – what the Pharisees and religious authorities kept accusing Jesus and his disciples of doing – not washing their hands before they ate, healing on the Sabbath, touching unclean people, and other ritual impurities set up in the Jewish law. None of this is in the Old Testament Torah – it is rules established mainly to set priests apart in the temple. Jesus ignores these “human rules” when necessary to heal someone or perform other missions.

I’ve thought a lot about the word “contamination.” We usually think of it as contaminated food, that makes us sick if we eat it, or contaminated water that we cannot drink or swim in. But when Jesus told the authorities that they had abandoned God’s commandments for human traditions, he also meant that the religious authorities themselves were contaminated. Instead of caring for their people, they focused on petty little rules like making sure certain dishes were kept separate from others, or making sure that they didn’t walk over a certain distance on the Sabbath. It didn’t matter if someone needed urgent assistance on the Sabbath.

We can become contaminated in our hearts, like the Pharisees, if we ignore the needs of others and the commandments Jesus set out as most important – loving God and loving our neighbor. Contamination will eventually destroy everything in its path if not checked. Jesus wants us to focus on being a beloved community, centered upon Jesus’ love for us and path he wants us to follow. If we do that, our hearts are clean and we can abide in the mercy and grace God desires for us.

Jeanne