

## MARK 7: 1-7

When it comes to many things in life, we embrace rules and laws .....  
Remember the ATKINS DIET.....EAT low on carbohydrates.

### I read an interesting Dieting rule book the other day, it's called THE NO CALORIE DIET

- 1 If you eat something, but no one else sees you eat it, it has no calories.
- 2 When drinking diet coke and a mars bar, the calories in the Mars bar are cancelled by the diet coke.
- 3 When you eat with someone else, calories don't count as long as you don't eat more than they do.
- 4 Foods used for medicinal purposes never count. For example Hot chocolate
- 5 If you fatten up everyone else around you, then you look thinner.
- 6 Movie related foods do not have calories because they are part of the entertainment package and not part of one's personal diet.
- 7 Biscuit pieces contain no calories ..... the process of breaking the biscuit causes calorie leakage.
- 8 Late night snacks have no calories. The refrigerator light is not strong enough for the calories to see their way into the calorie counter.
- 9 If you are in the process of preparing something, food licked off knives and Spoons have no calories.
- 10 Food of the same colour have the same number of calories. Examples are: Spinach and pistachio icecream, mushrooms and white chocolate.

### STORY

A man fell ill so an ancient story goes, between two villages.  
It was exactly half way between the two villages and that presented a problem to the authorities as to which village should take care of the stricken man,

Each village had different rules. It had to be decided which community the man was actually closest to. Therein lay the disagreement.

One village maintained that the distance should be measured from the man's navel; the other village argued that it should be calculated from the man's mouth.

The outcome of the little drama was obvious, of course. As the two communities argued over the rules, the poor fellow died.

### AND THEN

Remember the story of Gulliver's travels.  
He came to a land of tiny people, Lilliput and do you remember the rule those tiny people were going to war about.

It was **whether one should crack the big end of an egg or the little end.**  
**The two sides became known as the big enders vs. the little enders.**

The problem with rules is that they are a substitute for thought, and a way to bypass the character or lack thereof.

That was the problem with the Pharisees and that is sometimes our problem too.

We create rules that govern our behaviour, but then create ways to sneak around the edges of those rules.

Today, Jesus turns the table on external rules....

Vs. 1 The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, and vs 2... saw some of the disciples eating food with hands that were unclean, i.e. unwashed.

Vs 3 The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders.

Vs 4 When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.

Throughout the history of civilization, people have hated, people have gone to war, people have killed others in the name of rules & regulations, in the name of a law that one side perceived right, and the other side didn't.

Laws have been good in that they shape the conduct of society, but they have been harmful to society when the law becomes more important than the principle it is trying to uphold.

**Jesus met this same problem in our gospel lesson this morning. The scribes and Pharisees had come to Jesus and had seen that Jesus' disciples didn't wash their hands, an act prescribed by the law before they ate. They asked Jesus why.**

To understand this encounter between Jesus and these upholders of the law, we must understand the Jewish law that they were working from.

The law as given to the nation of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy and Leviticus.

But it was given in broad principals so that the people might have some freedom in interpreting the law for themselves.

But about 500 years before Jesus was born, a group of people emerged, the scribes, who were interested in upholding the letter of the law as they saw it.

So they developed their own oral law, or the law of the elders, to put exactness into these broad principles.

Over the course of time, the broad principles of the law became lost to the exact rules and regulations that were being poured out by these scribes.

**For example, the hand washing law became something like this:  
Before one ate, one must pour 1 1 / 2 egg-shells of water over his hands, but not just in any manner but in the prescribed manner.**

**He must hold the hands with the finger-tips upwards and pour the water over them until it ran down his wrists; he must then cleanse the palm of each hand with the fist of the other; he must then hold the hands with the fingertips pointing downwards and pour water on them from the wrists downwards so that ran off at the fingertips.**

This was not a matter of hygiene; it was a matter of ritual even if the hands were spotless it must be done. To do it was to please God, to fail to do it was to sin.

**So, can you see why the scribes and the Pharisees were wondering why Jesus' disciples didn't wash in the prescribed manner.**

But Jesus in one sentence, in one breath does away with all these oral laws, for he saw in them that they were not worshiping God but the law itself.

**He says: "You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of man."**

Jesus saw that the law was being used to turn people away from God by being so exact, instead of it being used to bring people to God to see his love and mercy.

Jesus goes on to say that it is not what is outside of a person that makes that person unclean, but it's what is in his/her heart that matters.

Jesus saw that religion was being used to escape the true religion, the worship of God. The religious leaders were using the law of men to gain respect, position and wealth over the people instead of showing the people how the law can help them to find God in their lives.

Jesus was freeing the people from the tyranny of the externals, and giving them a freedom to live with the law of love in their hearts.

**You know that the only laws that Jesus tells us in the whole of the New Testament is two.**

They go together.

**"You should love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind, and you shall love your neighbor as your self."**

Notice Jesus doesn't go beyond the broad principle of the laws, he doesn't define in exact detail how one should love God and how one should love a neighbor.

But in the rest of his teachings, in the way he lives, in how he acted, he showed us how one is to love God and one's neighbor.

But he gives us the freedom to express our love for God and our love for our neighbor in our own way, in our own unique God given way.

The religious leaders of Jesus day has lost the concept of the uniqueness of the human race. God has created each of us different, and in that difference, in that uniqueness we all have different talents, different ways, different abilities to worship God and to love our neighbor.

We have been given the freedom to express our uniqueness as we live our-Christian-life. But notice the broad principle still stands:

**The command is to love God with our whole being, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. That is a command. There is no freedom not to follow or live by that command.**

That is God's command to those of us who want to be his followers.

It is God's command for those of us who have been called by him in love and mercy.

That command is not something we might say: "Well God today I will worship you because I don't have anything better to do, or today God I will be good to my neighbor because I feel good."

**NO, that command transcends all of life. That command is not something we can turn on and off, but it is a reality that the people of God must live with. But how I worship God, how I love my neighbor, is up to my own uniqueness.**

**Now you see how radical Jesus' words are in our gospel lesson.**

He puts each person in an unique position to be of special importance to God.

For God enjoys, I think, the way each of us use the resources he has given us to worship him and to serve him through our neighbor.

In some ways, this freedom to live in the principle of the law is more difficult that living by the letter of the law.

Living by the letter of the law is easier because it is all spelled out in black and white.

I don't have to take any responsibility for my own actions, if I follow the law I can say it is good law, if I cannot follow the law I can say it is a bad law.

But when I am given the freedom to express the principle of the law in my own way, then I have to take the full responsibility for my actions.

I stand alone before God. I cannot blame anyone or anything for my failure to act, or for my failure for acting wrong.

I have a greater responsibility, but I think it is in that very freedom to act and to fail that I am more confident of the grace of God in my life.

For when I fail, I know his forgiveness is there for me, and when I succeed, I know it is by the grace of God, the love that God has for me that has seen me through.

I stand alone and naked by myself in the freedom of the law to worship God in my uniqueness and to serve him by serving my neighbor. It is literally God and I in the world together.

Yes, Jesus says we are free, free from the burdens of the law, but in that freedom we are given responsibility to act, to act with our unique gifts and resources to worship God and to love our neighbour.

**How will you use your freedom?**

**How will you worship God and love your neighbour?**