When Rite Is Wrong
Mark 7.1-13

21 ‘I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me.
22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them.
23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.
24 But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!’ Amos 5.21-24; Joel 2.12-13

‘Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘and I will accept no offering from your hands.’ Malachi 2.10

In Mark 7.1-13, Jesus is encountered by the Pharisees and scribes because they were upset with some of Jesus’ disciples. The Disciples, it seems, were not observing the traditions of the elders at mealtime. The Pharisees had become guilty of substituting true relationship with substitutes. We are capable of doing the same thing in the church. We like a certain routine, a certain order to things. And there is nothing wrong with order. In fact, the Bible says that things should be done “decently and in order.” But some things become full-fledged traditions without relationship.

WHEN IS TRADITION RIGHT?

In the church, we have certain traditions that are symbols of a higher reality. In fact, they were traditions that Jesus himself instituted.

WHEN IS TRADITION WRONG?

There is a tragedy of tradition which the church experiences all too often. This is when rite is wrong. Our text today speaks about the tragedy of tradition. Here, we see what Jesus thought about man-made traditions.

Mark 7.1-13

25 Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.
26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Matthew 23.25-26

HOW DO WE DETERMINE WHEN TRADITION IS RIGHT OR WRONG?

What is the ultimate test of tradition? How do we determine when our tradition is right and when it is wrong? We have seen how, at times rite can be right. We have seen how rite can be wrong. I believe the test for tradition is when rite is relevant.

Numbers 21.4-9; 2 Kings 18.1-4

In Numbers 21, the brazen serpent is the symbol of God's action in their midst. But the serpent became a tradition. They kept the serpent. The Bible says that they burned incense to that serpent for years until the time of Hezekiah, the King (715-686 B.C.).

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 14 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 15 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3.14-16

4 With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?
5 Shall the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
6 Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
7 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6.6-8