

Breaking Traditions

Week 2 More Questions Jesus Asked

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I know I'm not the only one who has noticed how many car washes there are around town. I thought it was just in Omaha. I think they were popping up everywhere in Omaha. Then I moved to Lincoln. And here they are. Same, same thing in Lincoln. It's. It's crazy. I don't get it. Personally. I'm not like, I have to have my car clean all the time kind of person.

for one, like, if the outsides clean, my insides not clean, and, you know, that's just inauthentic, right? To have them not matching. You know, I get the occasional wintertime washing the salt off, I get that. My sister, on the other hand, she loves her car wash pass. She uses it all the time.

Her car is always clean, and I when Lex. Lex is my son. He's 20 now. Like when he was little, my sister used to watch him occasionally and I told her, don't take Lex to the car wash. Like he doesn't like it and it's not going to end well if you take him to the car wash. But like a typical big sister, she did not listen to her little sister.

She took Lex through the car wash, and it didn't end well. She's like, you're right, he doesn't like the car wash. I'm like, I tried to warn you. Imagine getting stuck in a car wash and you're in a small town. There's no attendant around, and you're right in the middle of the car wash, and it just stops.

Now imagine you're stuck in the car wash. Small town. No attendant for. And you're stuck for the sake of tradition. Well, this happened to my dad a few years ago. The morning of my grandma's funeral. He stuck in the car wash because somewhere along the way, my dad was told that if you go to a funeral and you are going to be part of the process that goes to the cemetery, you must have a clean car.

Out of respect for God, out of respect for the deceased, out of respect for family like that is what he was taught. My dad's stuck in the car wash. He ended up having to, like, get out and like move some of the brushes out to get his car out. But he made it to my grandma's funeral on time.

His mother-in-law, which they always kind of had a funny joking relationship. I think grandma was part of this little scheme. But anyway, it was a little anxious for a while, but he made it. Now, my dad passed this tradition down to his kids, or at least he tried his best to pass this tradition down to his kids.

Years ago, one of my very first graveside services that I drove to instead of riding in the funeral car. So, I finish the funeral. I grabbed my keys, I went out to the parking lot and my car was dirty, and I had this feeling inside of me. I thought for sure God was going to strike me down, or the people in the church were going to, like, throw me out of the church and deny me as their pastor.

But none of that happened. I'm alive and well to tell the story, but for the sake of tradition, we do all sorts of things. Families have traditions, countries have traditions, but nothing like the traditions of the church. And when those traditions change, there can be some pretty good, heated arguments and controversy over changing a tradition and the church.

Well, traditions can and do change our behaviors. Some, for example, some people, here in our horizons, in this very space, some people are really, really thankful to have tables in the back of the worship center, right. It allows you to take notes. It allows you to doodle or fidget if you need, it maybe it's just a comfort thing.

There are so many reasons why somebody might choose to sit at a table, but not everyone here would sit back there at one of those tables, because that's not tradition. Now, one article I read recently said that there was no evidence of pews or seating in churches before 1480. During ancient worship, people would stand or kneel or, even mill about the church if they so choose.

Now, the article did say this too. I quote. There is no record of whether they engaged in stage dives or in crowd surfing, so we're forced to assume they did. The point is that we don't really know when some of these traditions started the pews and seats, instead of sitting around in a circle. First in homes and then in buildings.

The tradition of stained-glass windows, 800 AD seminaries didn't start till about 1300 AD. I'm not really sure. In conflicting, research when I tried to look at, the tradition of dressing up on Sunday morning, your Sunday best. Now, I realize my dad really loves traditions because I also remember arguing with my dad about wearing jeans for the first time to church, and he said no.

For a long time, I was probably in middle school. When he finally said I could wear jeans. And I also remember sometime during that time he stopped wearing a tie to church, and that was a really big deal for him. Now, fun fact I think this one is a fact, but neckties evolved from men competing to see who could wear the fanciest napkin.

at dinner, maybe, but then, according to National Geographic. This one's a little bit more factual. According to National Geographic, high heels evolved from Egyptian butchers not wanting to walk around in the remains of their occupation. I mean, I'm vegan. That's why you'll never see me in high heels. Just kidding. That has nothing to do with it.

Now, if I only knew then what I knew now about dressing up for church and this arguing with my dad, I would have said to him, do you know, first Peter chapter three, verse three through five says this your beauty should not come from outward. Adore adornment such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes.

Rather, it should be that of the inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God, used to adorn themselves. And then it says something about, you know, husbands submitting to your husbands, different sermon.

Dressing up for church is a tradition that started somewhere along the way. It was not part of the first century church. So many churches are kind of changing back horizons is one of them. We're kind of a little bit more casual now. If you grew up in the church, think about what church traditions that you really loved growing up in church and, and maybe you miss some of those traditions from growing up in church.

If you do miss those traditions, I want you to think about what is it about them that you miss now, there's some power in our in the text, in the in, in the Bible that we can find in Jesus has something to say about traditions. So, we're going to be in Matthew chapter 15, starting at verse one.

It says, Then the Pharisees and legal experts came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, why are your disciples breaking the elders rules handed down to us? They don't ritually purify their hands by washing before they eat. Jesus replied, why do you break the command of God by keeping the rules handed down to you? Now it's pretty classic that Jesus answers a question with a question.

This isn't the first time that he does it. but in the Jewish tradition, there are these written laws in there, and there are these oral laws, and the oral laws were put into place by the legal experts, the religious leaders. and they put these laws to kind of, put up a fence to, to help us follow the written law, God's law.

Earlier, the Pharisees, accused the disciples of breaking the Sabbath, and now they're talking about not washing your hands before eating, but they, the religious leaders put up these fences, these laws to protect the that these rules and traditions to protect the laws. So, for example, there were some things, and some these rules, these oral rules that were written to protect the Sabbath.

Looking in the mirror was forbidden because if you looked in the mirror and you saw gray hair, for example, and you pulled it out, that would be working. And working on the Sabbath is not okay. another rule was that you can't wear false teeth on the Sabbath, because if they fell out, you'd have to pick them up and put them back in, and that would be working.

There were all sorts of these, these oral laws in place to protect the written law. We continue on to verse four. So, Jesus is, continuing on. He says, For God said, honor your father and your mother. And the person who speaks against father or mother will certainly be put to death.

But you say, if you tell your father or mother everything I'm expected to contribute to you, I've given to God as a gift. Then you don't have to honor your father. So, you do away with God's law for the sake of the rules that have been handed down to you hypocrites, He says. Isaiah really knew what he was talking about when he prophesized about you.

These people honor me with their lips. But their hearts are far away from me. Their worship of me is empty since they teach instructions that are human rules. Now, the Pharisees were religious gatekeepers for the traditions and customs and laws and the point that Jesus is trying to make is that the traditions are being elevated above God's law, and Jesus continues later on.

More in this passage about dietary laws and restrictions. And that he goes, expands even further. So, honoring your father and mother is one of the Ten Commandments. It's God's law and the elders, though they had this tradition where they would say, well, the money that I was going to use to help my parents, I gave it to the synagogue instead.

Right? I gave it to all, to God. Now, what Jesus does, it doesn't say. He doesn't mention that this money that was given to the synagogue actually benefits the elders of the church. And so really, it's kind of like they're not letting go of their money completely because they are benefiting anyway. So, Jesus quoted Isaiah. He says, you know, they honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

This was true for the religious leaders. But unfortunately, it can also be true for us. We might look like we're close to God, but our hearts can be really far away. Despite what our appearance looks like, it's easy to be more focused on the appearance of being close to God rather than actually being close to God in our hearts.

But God, of course, knows the intention of our hearts, every aspect of our heart. God knows. Now, Jesus talks about money in this passage, about giving the money to the synagogue or the church and he knows the intention behind the Pharisees, why they're giving the money to the church. He knows our intention of why we give money to the church, or maybe why we don't.

Now, some of these traditions that we have are really good, and they are helpful in us staying in love with God. But we must be careful not to allow these guidelines or allow these fences to become fences that keep people out. See, when the Pharisees labeled people as unclean because of their traditions, they were basically shutting people from God.

They were stopping people from getting to know God. But Jesus says, don't do that. Don't create these fences and don't put these fences up that keep people from God. The message of the good news is one that breaks down fences and invites people in. Now, as part of our vision work, we have started this Good Neighbor Experiment cohort.

In the cohort a couple weeks ago, we talked about how design choices matter and how we talked about our homes, our individual homes, and how the design choices of our homes can help us be a good neighbor or prevent us from being a good neighbor. you think about front porches, right? Does your home have a front porch?

If so, do you use it? do you, do you leave your garage door open when you're in there working? All these things about our homes matter. Do we have fences in our yards? Maybe actual fences that help keep neighbors out? Or at least maybe even give the message of our intentions? Now, we first talked about our home and things that we can do to make sure our neighbors know that we want to be neighborly, but they also things apply to this church in our church property.

The vision team is working through what that looks like of how we can be inviting to our neighbors here, too. So. So what fences, physical fences or abstract fences do you put up that might be keeping people from knowing God? And when you think about that, we think about how we can break down those fences? How can we break down fences to allow people to know the love of God?

It's not just in our own neighborhood, because that's important, but it's actually the whole world, because Jesus is pretty clear when he says, go and make disciples of the whole world. Now, one of our values, here at Horizons, it states, and, and we live this out, is, is that we are impacting the world around us. That is important part of who we are here.

When we think about the world around us, there are all sorts of traditions in our world. Every culture has a different tradition. here's a picture from the, India, Independence Day. I love this picture. I love the colors. Then they also sent us some videos of some dances and songs that they did, which is, was amazing. But these kids can participate in, in this kind of celebration, in this tradition of their culture. Because of you, through our project Hope ministry, we get to celebrate different cultures. We get to see and live out a different culture cultural through these beautiful children. Now, this year we have given around \$35,000 to two children, children's home in India.

That's what project Hope does. these funds provide meals. They provide, education and clothes and most importantly, a safe place and even more importantly, a safe place where they're learning about the love of Jesus. Now, as Sister Jessie, who is the director of one of the homes, will be visiting, the United States, but even more so, we'll be visiting Horizons on September 15th.

She will be here, on stage in worship. And then there will be a lunch after where you can even find out more about what she is up to. And I hope you'll join us that weekend, because you will see that Sister Jessie has this beautiful spirit where she. She will show you how she loves Jesus. She will show you how she loves children.

She will show you how she loves horizons and the support that we give. Give. There. Now, Jesus didn't say that. All traditions are bad. He didn't say they were all good. He didn't say they were all bad. He said that we need to make sure that we put these traditions that we have in place at a lower priority than what God is telling us to do.

Of course, now is modern day Christians like we have. We have Jesus's words, and we get to read about Jesus's actions, and we get to interpret, what God intends for our lives through this, this wonderful, in this wonderful way. Now, I saw this quote on the internet, the other internet the other day, and I just screenshot it.

Then I was like, wow, this really kind of fits in my sermon. I don't know who said it. So, I just quoted the internet, but it says religious people will destroy a person to keep a tradition. Jesus will break a tradition to help a person. And we see this throughout the scriptures. We see Jesus doing this often, breaking traditions.

The religious leaders getting upset say like, no, this is not this is not what we do. This is not what we've done. And even though Jesus does this often kind of break these traditions to help a person, it doesn't mean that we just don't have any rules. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't have any guidelines. It doesn't even mean that we shouldn't have some fences around how we are worshiping God.

There are traditions and disciplines and behaviors that we should and shouldn't do to help us stay close to God. But that too, is for a whole another sermon series about what we need to do, the fences we need to put in our own lives to help us stay close to God. But today, Jesus's words invite us to be cautious and to be careful about what traditions and behaviors we might require someone to do before we invite them to know Jesus.

How do we filter through all the traditions and all the 600 plus laws that are in our, our, our Scripture? And how do we apply them to our ourselves so we can live, be a follower of Jesus, or invite others to join us? I know unfortunate, the Bible doesn't explicitly address everything that we've ever wanted to know perfectly.

For example, the Bible doesn't say don't do drugs like as in illegal drugs. The Bible doesn't. It doesn't say that in there. But the Bible does have a lot to say about self-control. And we know that, when we do drugs, right, that can have something to do with controlling ourselves. So, we look at the principles that's taught in the Bible, that's taught throughout Scripture, and then we make wise, wise decisions from there.

Above all, we look at Jesus's words and actions and principles that he taught. Now the Methodist in the Methodist tradition, we have something that's called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, where when making decisions, when thinking about how to do things, we first and foremost go to Scripture like that is the number one thing we do. But also, along with Scripture, we look at experience, we look at reason and we look at tradition.

All these things together can help us make wise decisions. All these things can help us unpack what Jesus is calling us to do. But sometimes we get stuck like the Pharisees, like the legal experts, and we get stuck in our traditions. We get stuck and well, this is the way that we've done it forever.

Sometimes we say, but really, maybe forever is the last hundred years of the church, or 200 years, or maybe even a thousand years of the church, because traditions have started all along the way. But we don't want these traditions to get in the way of loving God fully ourselves or sharing the good news of Jesus. So, think about what traditions might be getting in the way of you loving God with your whole heart.

and not just saying it with your lips, as the Scripture says, but with your whole heart. What physical or abstract fences do you have up that are that are getting in the way of loving your neighbors or inviting others to experience God's love? And then when you think about that, when you when you see, okay, I realize that I've have some fences up, then we start to break down those fences.

And when we break down those fences, we reveal a beautiful God that is worthy of worship. That's what we reveal for ourselves and for others. That's what a follower of Jesus does. That's what a good neighbor does. That's what Horizons does. If we break down enough barriers, we expose God's true self, revealing that everyone has a place at the table.

Would you pray with me? Grace. Gracious God, you sent your Son Jesus to us, to this earth so that everyone could have access to your love and your forgiveness. That everyone could be saved. Help us to live our lives following you with our whole hearts, rather than just with our lips. Help us to see any walls or fences that are that are in the way of us connecting with our neighbor or our neighbors, connecting with you.

Help us to open up the gate to show the world your love through our actions and through our words. Help us to be the kind of church that you want us to be. Help us to be the kind of Christian and follower of Jesus that you want us to be, knowing fully who you are, allowing ourselves to fully worship you, knowing that we are saved because of Jesus. God, we say all of this in Jesus's name, Amen.