**Text: Ephesians 6:10-20, Mark 7:14-23**

We Don’t Need Any Outside Help

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Parents often attempt to teach their children to make good decisions. As I’m certain we all know, most likely through personal experience, children do not always make good decisions. One of the challenges that parents often face is the threat of negative outside influence. I remember my teachers and my parents used to say, “If one of your friends tells you to jump off a bridge, would you do it?” Now of course the answer to that question is supposed to be no. We know at a young age that jumping off of a bridge is, more often than not, going to be hazardous to our health. However often times the temptations that we face are not obviously life threatening. That is what makes temptation such a dangerous thing, it doesn’t always threaten our physical lives, so we don’t look at it as something to take as a threat. But in reality, temptation is dangerous. It can cause us to turn our eyes from God and more so, it can cause us to live an ungodly life. And at times, we look at outside influences as the main contributors to the temptations that we face. For instance, have you ever noticed that when a sports team loses, fans will make all letter of excuses. Oh the weather was terrible, the refs missed a bunch of calls, they got lucky, all excuses. Rarely do you ever hear a fan of a team say, “Well they were just better than us.” Because that hurts our pride. Even in our own lives, we are more likely to give the credit for our pitfalls to outside influences than our own failures. But this leads me to one of the most important lesson that sports taught me, first and foremost, before anything else can change, I have to get my own house in order. Outside influences, like media and fans are often not the reason why a team struggles. Often times the real issues have to do with something inside the team, and before anything positive can happen, those issues need to be cleaned up. We need to be able to get our own houses in order before we start to blame outside influences.

Jesus speaks to this rather boldly in our Gospel lesson. For in our Gospel lesson, Jesus doesn’t warn us about making the right friends or using positive influences. No instead Jesus tells us that all that defiles us comes from within! What a wonderful Gospel message that Jesus has for us. It isn’t the outside world that corrupts you, but rather that corruption comes from within you. Not necessarily comforting words that Jesus gives to us this week. There is no message of peace, no message of eternal life, no message of the savior of the world. But like with everything else that Jesus says, he speaks the truth, and he speaks it boldly. And the thing about the truth is that sometimes, it’s hard to hear. You see the message that we want to hear is that our sin is not our fault, rather it is the fault of something or someone else. There is a saying that is often spoken in jest, “the devil made me do it.” The devil made me do it. Yes, certainly it was the devil that forced us into sin, he forced us into it kicking and screaming. Well Jesus puts that argument to rest here. Jesus says, “**Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him…What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.**” Notice what it is that initially defiles us. It isn’t our actions, it isn’t the fact that we act out of envy or deceit, but the fact that those thoughts arise from our hearts and our minds. For Jesus is telling us that it isn’t our actions that defile us, because by the time we complete those actions, the work has already been done. Jesus doesn’t mention that it is other people or places or things that put these thoughts in us, but rather they arise from within. And look at what it is that Jesus tells us is evil. Sexual immorality, not the actions, but the thoughts. Jesus also said in Matthew chapter 5, “**But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**” We have seen, recently, the destruction that can come from these types of defiling thoughts. Coveting, another thing that Jesus mentions here. To covet means to yearn, to desire to possess something. Most often the things that we covet the most are those things which we cannot afford or are owned by someone else. But notice, again, this is not a physical action. I can, and do, covet things all the time, while I’m driving and I see a Lamborghini, or the athletic ability of athletes. In fact, one of my parents’ favorite channels is HGTV and I actually like watching shows with them like house hunters. I sit there and I watch those people look through 3 houses and I find myself coveting those houses. We must be strong to resist such a difficult temptation as coveting. It is impossible to escape this reading without a feeling of dread. For Jesus tells us, essentially here, that we are all corrupt and defiled due to our own, individual, nature, our own individual original sin.

We know that this gospel lesson for today is just a sampling of the preaching that Jesus did throughout his ministry. We know that Jesus also spoke words of love, and peace, and hope. Yet, as I stated before, no matter what the message is, Jesus always tells the truth. The fact is that the things that Jesus told his disciples hold just as true for us as it did for them. The fact is also, that the things that Jesus mentions here are still issues that we deal with at large in our society. What’s more is that our society finds some of these things are good and helpful. Last week, Jesus told us that we should follow the commandments of God before we follow the traditions of man. Well all of the things that Jesus shows us today, theft, murder, adultery, pride, all of those things, are traditions of man. These are wicked things that man has been doing since the fall. In our bible study this week we read the story of Cain and Abel. Now those were the first 2 offspring born to Adam and Eve, and since them, mankind has been killing one another. Yes, these are all traditions of ours, these defiling thoughts. But Jesus did not tell us the truth in order to have us despair. He told us the truth so that we could repent of our sin and turn away from it. That through this truth we might be able to resist and overcome temptation. While we may need no outside help in defiling ourselves, let it be known that we have it in the father of lies. For Satan often presents temptation to us like a delectable treat, and we all to often take a bite. Yet despite all of this, Paul shows us in our epistle lesson, that our God gives us the tools to resist temptation. Our God gives us his armor to put on, in order that we may stand firm. He gives us the belt of truth, the truth of his Gospel. The truth that shows us that our sin is forgiven through the death of Christ. The truth that shows us that because of his resurrection, death no longer has dominion over us. Through Christ and the Holy Spirit God places on us the breast plate of righteousness. This he places on us at our baptism, by declaring us his own and giving to us the Holy Spirit. It is through this giving of the Holy Spirit that our God gives us the shield of faith. The shield of faith, which believes and trusts in the truth and righteousness that God has bestowed upon us. Our faith, which believes and hopes in salvation and knows, that there is more that just life on earth. All of these things lead us to the helmet of salvation. The end goal of Jesus’ mission and ministry, to bring all people unto himself, to give them a heavenly home. Christ is our salvation, and God gave him to us so that we might obtain it. Finally this leaves us with our weapon, the sword of the spirit, the word of God. This is what we truly have to combat the spiritual turmoil that resides within us. I think that it is important to note, that which defiles us comes from within, and that which purifies us, comes from God. We cannot purify ourselves, only God can do such a thing. And he does. He does so for us frequently in forgiving our sin, feeding our souls, and speaking His word to us. Jesus may not have had a message of peace for us today, but make no mistake, Jesus is our peace. For even though he may have had to strike us with the law today, it certainly does not minimize the love that he had for his neighbor. For what our Lord did on Good Friday and Easter morning certainly put that on full display. My friends I urge you this day, resist temptation. Fight it with all your might, never forgetting the armor and weapon that our God has given to us to fight it. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.