

MARK 7:1-5 DOING IT RIGHT

¹ The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and ² saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were “unclean,” that is, unwashed. 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. 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.) ⁵ So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?”

Every time I read this passage I hear Tevye from *The Fiddler on the Roof* singing in the background of my mind the word, “Tradition!” That was the reason why things had to be the way they were, or could be no other way. The category of tradition seems to be a catch-all for those practices that we persistently perform, but really don’t have any good and logical reason for doing. It feels right, and besides, we’ve always done it that way. I am reminded of the story about the Thanksgiving turkey. It seem that for as long as anyone could remember, at least 3 generations, the turkey was prepared for cooking by cutting it in half before placing it in the oven. It was so much a part of the tradition that no one ever questioned the procedure. However, one year one of the little children asked why the turkey was cut in half. After a period of the adults looking at each other and trying to come up with a plausible explanation, it was agreed that they would research the question to find out. Since great-great-grandmother was the oldest family member and in a local nursing home, someone was dispatched to inquire of her. Great-great-grandmother didn’t remember a lot of things, but Thanksgiving had been repeatedly engraved in her mind. When asked why the turkey was cut in half, her eyes twinkled and she answered, “Because mother’s oven was too small for the whole turkey to fit...of course!”

Traditions are good until they become barriers to our understanding of the truth. The same comfort and assurance we get from the security of tradition, can become a barrier to both our growth and our ability to receive a revelation. Think on this statement today: “The faith of your fathers’ is only effective when it becomes your faith.”

Father, deliver me from the complacency of blindly following tradition. Cause me to engage fully in all that I do and all that I believe. In my relationship with you, let no part of me take you for granted because of the long standing practices of others. Amen.