

**2017-08-20 HANDS AND HEARTS Genesis 45:1-15 Matthew 15:1-20
Fellowship Church**

“Have you washed your hands?”

It has been a long time since I was asked that question.

But when I was boy, I was asked it hundreds of times...every time I came to the table... and many other times.

It went along with many other questions regarding cleanliness –

Did you wash your neck?

Did you wash behind your ears?

Did you wash between your toes?

“Cleanliness is next to godliness.” was a very often heard motto in our house.

I had a cousin whose mother told him about germs, told him about the danger they posed, and turned him into a kid who washed his hands all the time and for a while was so worried about germs that he had a hard time playing with us.

Another thing I heard a lot was, “You have to eat a peck of dirt before you die.”

There seemed to be some sort of basic conflict between those two sayings, but I never bothered to bring this up for discussion.

We are still very concerned with cleanliness.

There are hand sanitizers on the walls all over Premier gym where I work out every day, and we are encouraged to wipe down the machines after every use with sanitary wipes that are everywhere.

We are warned to wash fruits and vegetables before eating them.

A sign in every restaurant restroom reminds workers to wash their hands before returning to work.

You have probably noticed that those who serve communion use a hand sanitizer each Sunday as they get ready to serve.

But when the religious leaders complained to Jesus about his disciples not washing their hands they were not concerned with sanitation.

Following the tradition of the elders of the community that went back many centuries they washed their hands to be ritually clean...it had nothing to do with germs which they knew nothing about.

Jesus was not concerned with ritual cleanliness and so his disciples did not follow the practice.

Jesus was concerned about what came out of the mouth, not what went in.

I remember that there was also a great concern about what came out of our mouths at our house

I do not know if you ever had your mouth washed out with soap or not.

In our family if you spoke a bad word...or a hurtful word...or an untrue word you ran the risk of having your mouth washed out with soap.

And if that happened you hoped she reached for the Ivory soap and not the Octagon soap.

There was powerful symbolism in that practice...it helped clean up our speech.

Later James would write in his letter to the churches about the importance of controlling our tongues.

With the tongue, he wrote, "We bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God"

The tongue must be tamed if we are to live a godly life.

Jesus gives us a list of evils that come out of the mouth - evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.

It is these evils that come out of the mouth that defile us, not what goes into the mouth.

We have a saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.”

Nothing could be further from the truth!!!

Most conflicts begin in a “war of words”.

That is what makes the inflammatory words that were being exchanged between Kim Jung Un of North Korea and President Trump so disturbing and dangerous.

That is why people who understand the power of words are calling for the rhetoric to be dialed down before a “war of words” becomes a shooting war.

Just last weekend in Charlottesville we witnessed the power of shouted words to

Stir up hatred and animosity

Inflame emotions

Divide and polarize

A new phrase has entered our society’s vocabulary: VERBAL ABUSE.

It is a problem in all our society

The home

The school

The workplace

Sports and entertainment

Mental health

What comes out of our mouths has become a major problem.

But the real problem is not the mouth; it is the heart.

There can also come out of the mouth words that

Heal rather hurt

Build up rather than tear down

Make whole rather than divide

When Joseph's brothers came down to Egypt during the famine a crisis moment arrived for the people of God.

He could have been bitter and vindictive, but he spoke words of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

It changed the brothers, the family, and the history of the people of God.

His heart had been changed, and that is what God can do.

Jesus came with good words – that is what the gospel is – good news, good words.

CLEAN HANDS ARE STILL IMPORTANT.

CLEAN HEARTS ARE ESSENTIAL!

