

BLESSINGS ALWAYS

August 28, 2024

Association Minister Message

Rev. Daniel L. Busch

DEFILE. Jesus said, "It is from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come... All these evil things come from the inside and contaminate a person in God's sight." (Mark 7:21, 23, CEB). Jesus was continually challenged by the religious (Pharisees, Scribes, Priests) authorities' interpretations of the Law. They had made the Law inflexible, literal, and uncompromising. Breaking the Law as they interpreted it, *DEFILED* God's way. An interesting translation of *DEFILE* is "*besmirch*," which they thought would slander and reject God's will. These religious leaders were so focused on their interpretation of "*doing things right*" (and telling everyone else how to live life), that they could not understand God's grace in the Law of orderliness and respect for God's creation and all God's children. In the passage from Mark 7, the religious leaders were so concerned about washing hands rather than developing a faith community of persons connected to the hands. Exclusion was based on limitations rather than caring for and welcoming all into the faith community.

Episcopal Bishop Rev. John Shelby Spong (now deceased), wrote, "*All human beings bear God's image and must be respected for what each person is. Therefore, no external description of one's being, whether based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, can properly be used as the basis for either rejection or discrimination.*" God is the ultimate determinator of sin(s) and offers grace, forgiveness, affirmation, love, and extravagant welcome to all as beloved kinfolk and as God's family.

Jesus declared that words destroy or affirm one another with blessings or curses. It is from the heart that fears, prejudice, and wars *DEFILE* relationships with one another. What we do and say can bring peace and love in ways of inclusion, generosity, and sacrifice. Rev. William Sloane-Coffin's benediction declares: "*So may God take your minds and think through them. May God take your lips and speak through them. May God take your hearts and set them on fire.*" **BLESSINGS ALWAYS.**