

Matthew 15:1-20

“Picking and Choosing”

Alright sisters and brothers. It is time for another trip down memory lane with Pastor Richard. When my brother and I were very little my parents did not go in for any of that baby talk stuff. Goo Goo, Gah Gah – No way. My parents talked to my brother and I because they thought talking would help to give us a good start in life. They paid for it too. My brother and I both started talking using words early. So much so that Mom knicknamed me, “Motor Mouth,” and my little brother, “Chatter Box.” **(pause)** Now that I have been with y’all nearly a year I am sure none of y’all can imagine why.

Now I am so old that I can remember when back when *Bewitched*, *Bonanza* and *The Rifleman* came on TV in black and white. One Sunday afternoon I was watching a great black and white movie called, *Seargent York*. Kids, if you haven’t seen it, *Seargent York* is on Youtube. It is absolutely worth your time. After service go look it up. Some of y’all might remember when Seargent York is converted they are singing “Old Time Religion” in the church. Well part of that song got stuck in my head and wouldn’t you know it the Motor Mouth was off to the races. “If it was good for ... who were those names again... it’s good enough for me.” Pretty soon I started sticking names in the song. If it was good for the prophet Samuel. If it was good for the prophet Daniel it’s good enough for me.” I must have gone on and on until I had absolutely frustrated my Dad to no end. Dad looks and me and says, “Do you know who it wasn’t good enough for? **(pause)** Jesus.” **(long pause)** Well that shut me up. What did he mean it wasn’t good enough for Jesus? I didn’t begin to figure it out until years later. I was studying a similar passage to this one in Mark and Jesus’ teaching about traditions verses commandments. Suddenly it all made sense. We have a lot of tradition we like, and have grown up with – in our families, in our culture, and in our churches. What Jesus is saying this morning is just because, “we’ve always done it that way,” or, “that’s our tradition, does not mean it is good enough for Jesus.”

In this country we have long held history that has become traditions. I guess that’s the way those things happen. The first slaves were brought to the American colonies in 1619 when the Dutch brought slaves to Jamestown, Virginia. In 1641 slavery was legalized. African slaves had no rights under the law because they helped the American colonies become more profitable. In 1660 the King of England even created a company called the “Royal Africa Company” to transport black gold from Africa to the Americas. Slavery was very much still legal in 1776 when the United States declared independence from England. So much for freedom and justice for ALL. England freed their slaves first in 1807. Did you know John Wesley was a supporter of the emancipation of slaves in England? However, the United States continued and by 1860 over a million slaves were being moved and traded in the United States.¹

We’ve all heard this before. The thing that bothers me about this is the blame for slavery falls only on the wealthy plantation owners. It seems to me if the Civil War had only been fought by the plantation owners the war would have been over in a week. There just would not have been enough people to fight. There is another piece to the story, and we can see it in the racism which has been extended to Hispanics today. Going all the way back to 1619 there were white indentured servants, and eventually share croppers who had to compete with the free labor of slaves. When it is your family going hungry, or freezing in the cold because of an unfit house with newspaper stuffed into the cracks because you have to compete with those who will work for less... well yeah, I can see how that would make people angry. I can see how that could breed contempt, anger, and even hatred. This system created the situation where the white poor and working poor are angry because life is hard and these African slaves are cutting their legs out from underneath the white rednecks. When we look at Charlottesville, Virginia, those White Supremacists weren’t the sons and daughters of wealthy land owners. They were the rednecks who earned their name desperately trying to out-work the slaves – these slaves who were forced to work as the cheapest labor. The animosity between the two groups continued to fester and grow even after the Civil War through the time of Reconstruction; Jim Crowe and straight up until the Civil

¹ <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery> (viewed 8-20-17)

Rights era. Unless I am mistaken this is the missing part of the story about from where America's racism comes.

What makes things worse is our racism has been going on from 1619 to the present, 2017. That is 398 years. And while the hate is not **as** powerful as it once was, the hate is clearly still there. Over the years those who have supported this hate have picked and chosen passages of Scripture to support the divisions between white and black. I am sure these same Scriptures are being used by some to support the divisions between whites and Hispanics. This hate has become a tradition. Racism is not something we are born with. Racism is taught. Racism is a sin, handed down to the second and third generations. Isn't that the same way a tradition is handed down through the generations?

In this morning's passage Jesus is questioned about why the disciples do not follow the tradition of the elders. Trying to trap Jesus into putting a tradition ahead of God's commandments seems to really bother Jesus. Jesus spends 17 of the 20 verses in this passage explaining just why putting traditions ahead of commandments is a bad idea. At a time in history when you can't exactly run down to the Dollar General for a composition notebook and ball point pens that is a big deal. We should probably pay attention to what Jesus has to say. Jesus scolds the Pharisees privately (vv 3-9), and publicly (v10-11); and then Jesus has to explain it all over again to the Disciples because they were washed in these traditions as well. **"Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and so passes on? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and this defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man"** (Matt 15:17-20).

Brothers and sisters, Racism is an evil thought. I don't care what color you are. Racism is an evil thought. Racism leads to murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness and slander because racism gives us an excuse to treat others as if they are not called to be God's people. The Great Commission says, **"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"** (Matt 28:19). Did you catch that? Go and make disciples of **ALL** nations. Jesus never said we get to pick and choose. How are we supposed to reach those people who are different from us? Jesus said, **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"** (Matt 22:39), and, **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another"** (John 13:34). Jesus calls us to offer friendship to those who do not look like us. Jesus wants us to make friends with those who do not look, or talk like us. You know; the folks who aint from around here. Jesus wants us to bring a friend into the House of the Lord so they would know the love of God for themselves. Sisters and brothers Jesus did not come to teach hate. Jesus came because of God's love for us (John 3:16). There is no room in God's love for us to hate one another. Last week we talked about how there, "Aint no mountain high enough" to keep us from God's love. As members of the household of Christ there is no hurt, there is no pain, there is no grudge bad enough to justify the hate in the family of God. **Vengeance is the Lord's. We are to love one another** (Lev 19:18). This tradition of picking and choosing who to love, or picking and choosing which Scriptures to follow in order to justify racism and hate is not good enough for Jesus. If it is not good enough for Jesus it is not good enough for me. Brothers and sisters, how about you? **(pause)**

In Jesus' name - Amen