

Week of January 15-21

## **TRADITION**

**Scripture Reading:** Read Matthew chapter 15

The very successful musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*, produced in 1964 for Broadway, traces the story of Tevye, the father of five daughters, and his attempts to maintain his family and Jewish religious traditions in the midst of a changing world in Russia just before the Bolshevik Revolution. Almost 50 years later, the musical is still as popular as ever and continues to be performed by high school drama programs across the nation.

For those who may not have seen the film, it opens with a fiddler playing on a rooftop as Tevye delivers milk. Tevye likens his life and that of his neighbors to the fiddler and he shares in one word the secret on how they keep balanced in life: **tradition**. After the opening song, entitled, "Tradition," Tevye concludes with the line, "Without our traditions, our lives would be as shaky as a fiddler on the roof."

While we may not take our traditions that seriously, most families do value the role traditions play in their homes. Things like special bedtime rituals, holiday celebrations, favorite vacation spots, etc. can all provide a sense of order and security for us in our family life. Our chapter reading today has a thing or two to say about traditions also.

The chapter opens with the Pharisees and teachers of the law criticizing Jesus' disciples for not following the traditions of the elders. Their crime: failing to wash their hands before they ate. At first glance, this may seem a little odd to be the source of conflict. Hand washing? You have to be kidding. What's the big deal about a little dirt? This, however, misses the point. It wasn't about dirt per se; it was about traditions that were passed down from generation to generation, traditions which the Pharisees believed were as sacred as the written law of Moses itself. These leaders had elaborate rules for everything, including hand washing and, to their thinking, Jesus and his disciples were flaunting these sacred traditions.

Jesus confronts the Pharisees and teachers of the law and illustrates how their traditions were being used to upend truth. Jesus challenges their hypocrisy head-on and points out how tradition was keeping them from obeying God's commands. They followed the traditions of men but rejected the truth of God.

Family traditions can be wonderful tools to connect our lives with the past, build memories in the present and provide security for an ever-changing future. They can, as Tevye points out, keep us balanced in life. Sadly, as with the case of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, our traditions can sometimes keep us from following the truth. When our traditions contradict the truth, they have to be discarded if we're going to follow the king.

### **Action Step & Prayer Focus:**

Just for fun, rent the movie, "Fiddler on the Roof" and enjoy the film. Afterwards, reflect on any traditions you have that interfere with the truth. Repent and side with the truth.

**Take-a-way:** *When tradition trumps truth, trash the tradition & choose the truth.*