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**August 30, 2009**  
[www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org](http://www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org)

**Tradition of the Elders**  
**Psalm 27:1; 13-14; Mark 7:1-8; 14-15**

You are familiar, no doubt, of this St. John's pictorial directory. On the front cover you will see this--- Established 1922. Perhaps there is a more recent pictorial directory, but this is my most recent.

If you take time to leaf through its pages you can see many photographs of our church members. These photos are in color. As I open the directory I see very nice pictures, in fact, I can pick out particular people from its pages.

Ah, here is one (as I look at the page and then the congregation). You are still wearing the same tie, I see! You can see how much you have changed since this photo. Look at this one. You are standing beside your parents—just a teen. Now look at you today as you sit with mom and dad. Can you believe how the human body can change so rapidly in just three years?

Here is another photo. You are such a handsome man and you are, indeed, a beautiful young girl. As I look around this place I notice some are missing, some have expired, but the spouse is here. It does not take long for sadness to move in our heart, does it? Some are now retired from their labors. Others, of course, have returned from some days in the hospital. We are changing and life is being lived on a daily basis.

We reflect on the past and ask others and ourselves, "How did we change so quickly—it seemed so sudden. We often experience so many changes we don't stop to ask those gnawing questions.

Often, we say, "We are doing our best to adjust to the swift changes, this shifting-rapid communication." Yes, we strive to connect the dots of our existence, but we also miss the numbers sometimes in this life process and the image or picture becomes less clear, not so distinguishable. Fragmentation to our life comes in abundance at times, and we experience being unconnected with God and each other. This being unconnected between our mind and our action and being unconnected between our emotion and our physical well-being can be devastating.

At St. John's we know there is a place for us. This place has meaning for me and you. It has been church for me and my family. So much so that we often feel while choosing St. John's we as a family were being chosen to connect to this fellowship. It was the music ministry, the youth activities, the children's programs that meant so much to our family.

Look at the church family today and you will see we need people between the ages of 40 and 55. Let us invite them to join us and come and worship with us in this place. By saying that, I do not mean we do not need others, such as young adults, young people, children of all ages, if you please! Yes, we do need more of them as well.

We have rich traditions here, do we not? We hold these traditions close to our heart as we enjoy the routines, the rituals, and liturgy in worship. However, some of our traditions may be changing and some may say, "Don't tamper with that!" And another person may express their questions and anxious feelings of what we, as a church, are all about in this place, this community and with these groups of people.

“Why do you observe communion the way you do?”

“Why do you have so many women who take the offering on Sunday?”

“Why do your children leave the worship at the beginning of the service?”

We have many ways of doing different things, and some people are observing our actions—looking at our rituals---questioning our way of doing church.

In the Gospel of Mark the passage read earlier is a difficult passage. It is not about a food fight, though the eating of food was involved. It seems to be more about keeping the body pure, keeping our hands clean while keeping my sense of self pure and undefiled. We do seek purity and, yes, we do need cleansing.

We say we choose to be unique, different in one way or another. Perhaps, just small differences, but we keep certain traditions alive and other traditions we often forget.

When I read Mark’s Gospel I become aware of how fast things and events are moving in this Gospel.

I enjoy watching football and one of my favorite color commentators is John Madden. Madden might say something like, “Right there, BOOM! Did you see that big ole tackle turn and make that play?” (While he is marking the action of the BOOM on the TV computer monitor, by the players on the field). That is the way it appears to me the author of the Gospel of Mark is describing the rapid advance of the Good News as it relates to Jesus of Galilee.

John the baptizer came on the scene (Mark, chapter one) with no recording of his birth, no early childhood recorded. The Gospel reads, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.’”

John came proclaiming to the masses, to all who would listen and obey. He shouts, “Be cleansed of your sin, be born again and seek regeneration. You are a defiled people and you must repent” How is this to happen? It was by water for John as he preached a turning away from evil and a turning to God.

Jesus comes to John to be baptized in the Jordan. “Jesus, why do you come to me for baptism? You should be baptizing me” Jesus seeks the baptism of repentance through his cousin, John. He is baptized, and as Jesus comes up out of the water, the Gospel tells us something very unique, very distinctive, was happening to Jesus. The heavens were torn apart and the Spirit descended, and afterward Jesus finds himself in the wilderness for forty days being tempted as all human beings are tempted. (Matthew 4)

- The temptation: To worship so many other gods and not Yahweh
- The temptation: To own all the stuff, all the real estate touching mine
- The temptation: To claim all power and to work magic

In Mark 7, Jesus and his disciples are “out and about” the region of northern Galilee. They are greeted by the Pharisees and some scribes who have come all the way from Jerusalem. They have left the Temple to see for themselves what Jesus is doing.

Already having been baptized by John the baptizer, Jesus and his disciples are going to the small villages. People are being brought to him for healing purposes, and to hear this wise Teacher who teaches the sacred sayings about the Kingdom of God.

Where to turn with our own temptations is a matter of great importance. We are human too. We struggle with our own identity, our own sexual feelings, and our own sense of where from here in this tough world. We ask, “How am I to respond to this Jesus of Galilee and how can I accept his teaching: The Kingdom of God has come!

As one prominent NT scholar said, “Heaven is in great shape. Earth is where the mission must be accomplished, and the earth is where our attention is sorely needed.” Let us stop waiting for Heaven and get busy here on earth, this place where people need love, attention, and healing.

We know down deep in our soul that something fierce is needed in every relationship now and then. Life if not pretty sometimes, it takes a radical change to get our attention and mend our ways. However, when that fierce thing occurs we tend to be more open to talking instead of sulking, we are open to communicate more freely than ever before.

Not the crazy, wild and damaging relationships! No, what I am saying is this: we need constructive communication, honest dialogue, critical thinking and a willingness to forge ahead in faith—as we seek the Kingdom of God!

Within 35-45- miles of our church building another church, through its deacons, recently brought to the business meeting a recommendation to “kick out” two men from its membership who had a big squabble on their softball team. It took an elderly lady’s amendment to bring a dose of maturity to the church’s intended actions. The result, the church members were not “kicked out” of church, but could not play on the softball team.

We must seek to be peace-makers even among our own family members and certainly in this world around us.

The Pharisees and the scribes, coming from Jerusalem and the Temple, confront Jesus. We have noticed your disciples are eating with defiled hands, and you are doing nothing about it. Our tradition is clear: you must obey the purity laws and the Holiness Code of the old days.

“Isaiah had it correct when he prophesied about you hypocrites,” said Jesus. Here we need to be reminded, I think, that Jesus being Jewish and his disciples being Jewish, as well, certainly knew the purity laws and the practices of the Temple. So Jesus was not saying, BAD-BAD-BAD. Rather he seems to mean this: You as a Pharisee and as a scribe are truly ACTORS aren’t you. You are playing a role, you are acting out what you think must happen, but you are placing the emphasis in the wrong place.

You have missed so many “happenings/miracles” by staying in the Temple far to long and not meeting the needs of the people. Blind people can see again. More people have found encouragement and their burdens are lifted. The Kingdom of God has come, and you are missing out.

You have forgotten the Ten Words, the Ten Commandments of old. As Dr. George Retzlaff stated some years ago,

“And just what part of ‘Thou Shalt Not Steal’ do you NOT UNDERSTAND?”

Jesus went on to point out how the Pharisees and the Temple cult have short-changed some people by demanding more fees be paid to the Temple and thereby taking resources from older adults (mothers and fathers) and desecrating the commandment to honor parents and take care of them throughout life.

We know today many children live as fatherless children and, often, motherless children. What more can we do, what more can be done to alleviate this problem?

Often, harshness breeds in the hearts and minds of children and we hear some say, “I hate you” with all the intense feeling they can muster.

Isaiah 29:4

*“Then deep from the earth you shall speak, from low in the dust your words shall come; your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, And your speech shall whisper out of the dust.”*

It would appear that hope had died, never to return. A dark foreboding was at hand in this passage.

It is in Jesus that hope is found. Jesus is the person we can trust as one who understood the human condition, the human personality. It is Jesus who can bring a meaningful life to each of us and help us deal with our own darkness. The Christian faith needs self-disciplined people teaching and living the Kingdom of God.

O God, it's me it's me standing in the need of grace and prayer.

Mark's Gospel tells of the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus pushed back hard and it cost him his life. We all need a change for the better and that could include an awareness of God's love for each of us and all of us.