

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 16) – August 25, 2024

*⁶And Jesus said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of
you hypocrites, as it is written,*

*‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;
⁷in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines
the commandments of men.’*

⁸ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

–Mark 7:6–8–

Traditions. I love traditions. Growing up, I learned about many of the traditions from my mother’s side of the family, who had come over to Nebraska from Denmark in the 1870s. Recently, since having my own children, I have continue to pass along some of those tradtions. Other traditions we’ve instituted within the last decade.

Traditions can certainly be good. They can often remind us of where we came from. Church traditions can help us to focus on Jesus during our worship services. Unfortunately, traditions can lead to disagreement, conflict, and turmoil. Churches have split over traditions. A Lutheran congregation in a small town got in a big disagreement early on in their establishment. Many were German immigrants. One group wanted to keep the tradition of worshipping in their native language of German. Another group thought it was time to speak the language of America and hold worship services in English. Sadly, they couldn’t come to some sort of compromise, so they split into two congregations. One group built a church just three blocks away from the other one. Ironically, both congregations worship in English to this day.

Why do churches split over traditions? When we treat a tradition like it’s God’s command, etched in stone, it can lead to conflict and discord. The Pharisees viewed Jesus to be a bad person because he was breaking their traditions. Their traditions seemed good and were meant to honor God. However, they judged people by how well they kept the traditions and not how much they loved God. As we hold on to our traditions above anything else, we are not honoring God with our hearts. We are in reality honoring him with just our lips. May we place our focus on what’s most important: that which Jesus has called us to do. And may we not become so fixated on what a tradition calls us to do.