

**September 1, 2024**  
**Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 17**

**Meditation:** “Tradition”

When I first read this passage I thought, ‘this sounds like advice from Public Health.’ Wash your hands before you eat. Wash your produce from the market. Wash your dishes and pots and pans and even your bedding. Where is Amanda? I’m sure she would be supportive of all of this.

Then another word jumped out at me.

Have any of you seen the movie (or the play) *Fiddler on the Roof*? Do you remember the main character, Tevye? He is speaking for his community in his neck of the woods in his time, but it could just as easily be us, here, and now. Life is so difficult, what with the high cost of food and fuel and shelter, and the unpredictable and extreme weather brought on by climate change, and violence, whether terrorism, war, or just plain crime, and addictions, and mental health issues, and chronic illness, and, and, and.... And here come Tevye’s words, “how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word! Tradition!”

In Tevye’s world, the traditions that he is talking about establish the outward patterns of daily life: how to eat, sleep, work, what to wear, how to relate to one another. Tevye said, “Because of our traditions, every one of us knows who he is,” and, I would add, what is expected of him or her.

Traditions can be good things. They offer us a sense of security because they tell us what we can expect in life. For example, funeral services, when done well, offer comfort and security because we know what will happen. We know what scriptures we are likely to hear, what hymns we are likely to sing. We know that we will likely recite The Lord’s prayer – a statement about life, even in the face of death. They allow us to mourn our loss, and to laugh at the memories of good times spent together. They allow us to say goodbye and to let go, or at least to start the process of letting go, and moving on with our lives.

Sometimes we have family traditions. When I was growing up, the tradition in our family was that the Elves would come on Christmas Eve and make sure we were getting ready for bed. They always seemed to know when we were in the bathtub, and they left us new pyjamas to put on when we got dried off.

But traditions can also be less than helpful things. Jesus and his disciples were homeless wanderers. They had no place to call a permanent home: no kitchen to prepare meals, no place to lay their heads at night, no washroom to clean up before meal time. The Pharisees were sticklers about Jewish traditions. They believed that if only every single Jew would slavishly adhere to every single rule of Judaism, then the Messiah would surely come. So, they admonished Jesus and his disciples for not washing their hands before they ate. The question is, without a place to wash, were Jesus and the disciples supposed to adhere to the tradition and starve to death, or should they eat and live?

Can you think of any traditions that have outlived their usefulness?

The problem with traditions is that they are rules that are made by humans. Usually, they are made for very good reasons. Often, over time, those reasons cease to be relevant, and the traditions become dated and unhelpful. Sometimes traditions need to end, like the tradition of not talking to anyone about the abuse that happens within a family home. Life is not static. It is dynamic; always changing. Sometimes new traditions need to be developed as society changes, like land acknowledgments.

God is a God of life. God repeatedly says, "I am about to do a new thing, do you not perceive it?" God is always doing something new and unexpected and often even upsetting to those who like things to stay the same. For God, life and justice and compassion and righteousness and love trump tradition. God's ways trump human rules.

May our traditions serve to help us, and, when they cease to be helpful, may we have the courage and wisdom to leave them behind and create new traditions.

