

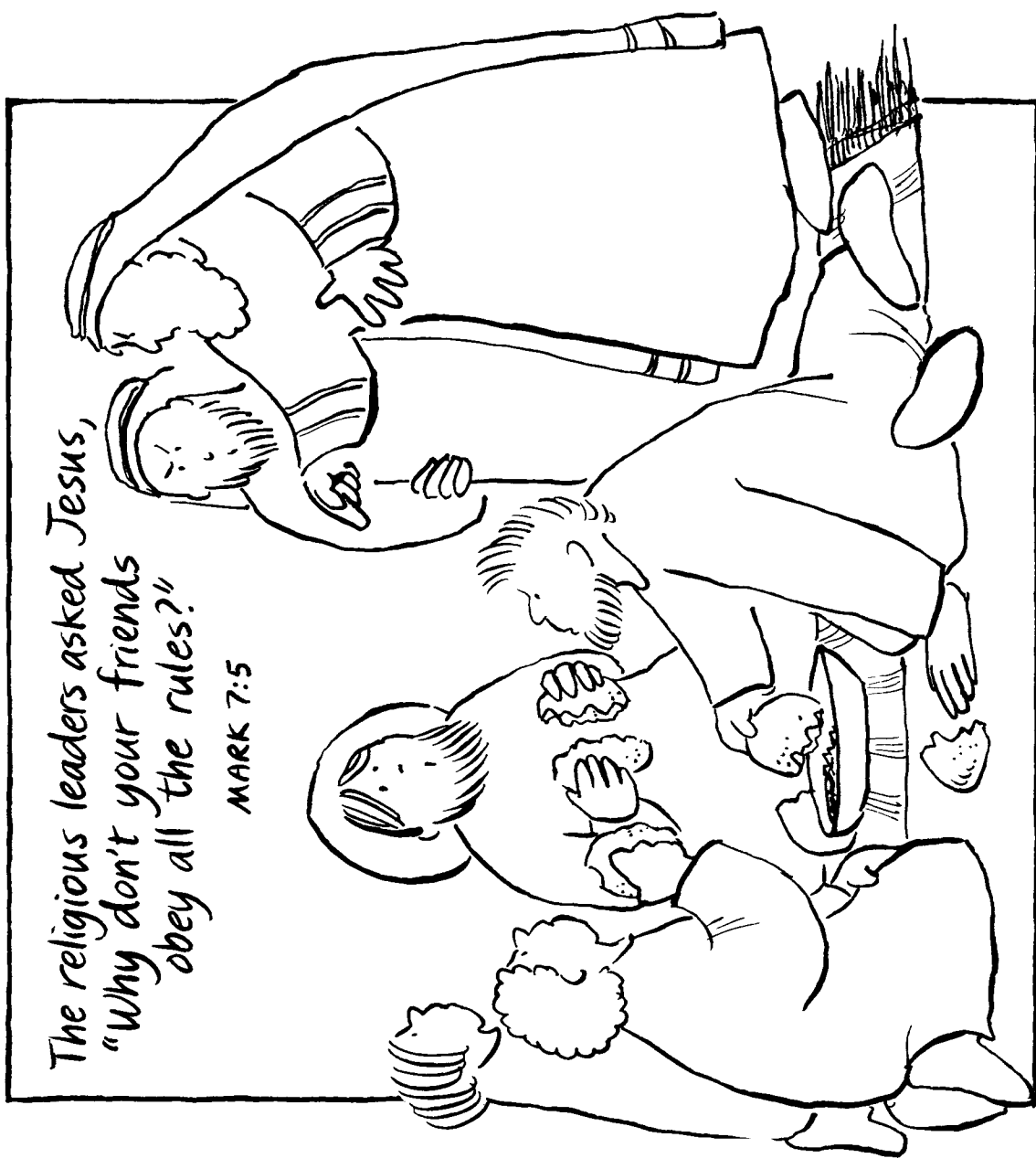
THE SUNDAY PAPER

JUNIOR

Year B
PROPER 17
TRACKS 1 and 2

The religious leaders asked Jesus,
“Why don’t your friends
obey all the rules?”

MARK 7:5



A NOTE TO PARENTS

“Cleanliness is next to godliness” is an old saying, and it is still true in our culture with its fear of germs, and its vast array of personal-care items and cleaning products lining the shelves of our stores. We may not keep as clean a house as our grandmothers did when they stayed home all day, but we certainly believe not only in clean hands but also in hot showers, body wash, shampoo and deodorant. We teach our children to wash their hands before eating—for excellent health-related reasons, as well as politeness and respect—and we definitely want the plates and glasses to be clean in any public dining facility or school cafeteria we may visit.

So we don’t necessarily sympathize right away with Jesus and his disciples when the Pharisees confront them for eating with unwashed hands. We may find it somewhat quaint that Mark has to explain to his readers that “the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands,” and that “there are also many other traditions that they observe,” such as “the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.”

The rabbis here, however, are not the Board of Health. Their confrontation with Jesus on this issue is just one instance of a much broader struggle, which is explored in greatest detail in the Gospel of Luke. Throughout the Bible, there is tension between a vision of holiness based on *purity* and one based on *justice and mercy*. In the “scribes and Pharisees” as depicted in the New Testament, devotion to the way of purity has become one-sided and distorted. In particular, it has become elitist. To read and learn the law, to observe its minutiae, and to maintain oneself and one’s household at the level of cleanliness it called for, took time, education, and access to large amounts of clean water. The poor simply did not have the resources. When the scribes and Pharisees “bound heavy burdens” on the poor, and implied that because they could not observe all the rituals they were unacceptable to God, Jesus lashed out in indignation. Purity had come to mean more than justice, let alone mercy.

What are we teaching our children about the relative importance of purity and justice? How does this scripture cast light on some of the ongoing struggles in society and the church?

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THE BIBLE IS FULL OF RULES.

The most important rules in the Bible are about loving God and loving other people.

WORSHIP GOD ALONE
MAKE NO IDOLS
HONOR GOD'S NAME
KEEP THE SABBATH

HONOR YOUR PARENTS
DO NOT KILL
DO NOT CHEAT
DO NOT STEAL
DO NOT LIE
DO NOT KEEP SCORE WITH YOUR NEIGHBOR

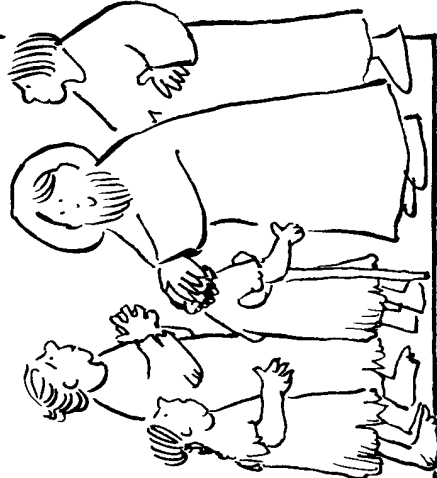
Other rules are about avoiding uncleanness - what to eat, when to wash, and so on, with lots of details.



Some of the religious leaders said that every single rule mattered just as much as all the others.



Jesus said, "God cares more about what is in your heart." ~ ☀



Jesus told the leaders that avoiding uncleanness is part of God's law, because God wants us to be pure and holy. But he said that following complicated rules does not make us pure and holy. What makes us pure and holy is the love in our hearts.

Help this boy to be pure and holy. Give him a friendly face, a loving heart, and people to care about.

