

**Introduction to Series: "Following Jesus as Anabaptists:
Examining our Roots, Imagining our Future" -
A Readers Theatre of Scripture based on Matthew 15:3, 7-9**

Reader 1: Oh, hey Greg. Good to see you. How have you been?

Reader 2: Good, Zac thanks for asking. Are you looking forward to our new worship series here at Bloomingdale?

Reader 1: Which one is that?

Reader 2: Oh, the one about Anabaptism. Apparently, we are going to dig deep into our "roots" and look at the value of our tradition while also "imagining our future."

Reader 1: Hmm...value of our tradition, eh? I'm not so sure I'm up for that. After all, didn't Jesus come to do away with "traditions?"

Reader 2: What do you mean?

Reader 1: Well, in his interactions with the Scribes and the Pharisees, didn't Jesus often get upset that they were just following human traditions and not God's law?

Reader 2: Can you give me an example?

Reader 1: I'm thinking of one time in the Gospel of Matthew, where the Pharisees didn't like that Jesus and his disciples weren't following the traditions around ritually purifying their hands before eating. In response, Jesus said to them:

"Why do you break the command of God by keeping *the rules* handed down to you?" ⁷ Hypocrites! Isaiah really knew what he was talking about when he prophesied about you, *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. Their worship of me is empty since they teach instructions that are human rules.*" (Matthew 15:3, 7-9)

Reader 2: Hmm. That's interesting. It seems like Jesus was upset by certain human rules that were becoming more important than God's law. So, do you think that means that all traditions are just human rules?

Reader 1: Maybe. I guess that's what I'm wondering. Do we at Bloomingdale really need to think about Anabaptist traditions? Can't we just follow Jesus and not bother with all the history stuff?

Reader 2: I don't know. It seems to me that we always come to know about Jesus from a particular history that has had an impact on us.

Reader 1: Really?

Reader 2: Yeah. Take a good number of us here today. For many of us, the tradition that we came to know Jesus through has roots in the Anabaptist movement. Of course, some of us have had other traditions that we came to know Jesus through like the Catholic, Lutheran, or United Church traditions or maybe we came to know Jesus after having had no church background at all. But ultimately, all of us here have had our understanding of faith influenced by communities that have a history and a unique set of understandings of faith.

Reader 1: And you think that's a good thing?

Reader 2: I don't think its *necessarily* good or bad, it's more neutral - just a fact of being human - we all have those who have come before us who have influenced our understandings of faith.

Reader 1: So, you don't think its possible to know Jesus apart from Tradition?

Reader 2: No, I don't think so. After all, didn't Jesus grow in stature and wisdom through learning from the richness and beauty of his Jewish traditions? And didn't his message about the coming Kingdom of God arise out of Jewish tradition, not apart from it? In Jesus, God brought something new and world-changing, but it was a newness that contributed to and built on his tradition.

Reader 1: I guess you're right. So maybe the problem I'm struggling with is not tradition, but what we do with it.

Reader 2: Say more.

Reader 1: Well, as you said before, Jesus' problem seemed to be with those who made certain traditions more important than seeking after God's law. Maybe the issue isn't with traditions, but with making sure that our traditions are always open to the way that God's law might call us into a new future through the Spirit's help. Maybe our traditions are most helpful when they nurture our *imaginations* for following God, instead of stifling them.

Reader 2: I like that. So, do you think this worship series might help us imagine a faithful future as followers of Jesus?

Reader 1: I think so! In fact, I'm looking forward to this now! But Greg?....By the time this worship series is over, I'm not going to have to give up my smartphone, am I?

FIN