

Mark 9:38-50

³⁸ John said to Jesus, “Teacher, we saw someone throwing demons out in your name, and we tried to stop him because he wasn’t following us.” ³⁹ Jesus replied, “Don’t stop him. No one who does powerful acts in my name can quickly turn around and curse me. ⁴⁰ Whoever isn’t against us is for us. ⁴¹ I assure you that whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will certainly be rewarded.

⁴² “As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and to be thrown into the lake. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to fall into sin, chop it off. It’s better for you to enter into life crippled than to go away with two hands into the fire of hell, which can’t be put out.^[a] ⁴⁵ If your foot causes you to fall into sin, chop it off. It’s better for you to enter life lame than to be thrown into hell with two feet.^[b] ⁴⁷ If your eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out. It’s better for you to enter God’s kingdom with one eye than to be thrown into hell with two. ⁴⁸ That’s a place *where worms don’t die and the fire never goes out.*^[c] ⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ Salt is good; but if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? Maintain salt among yourselves and keep peace with each other.”

Called to be Disciples

Mark 9:38-50

When the disciples criticize someone for casting out demons in Jesus’ name because the man “was not following us” (Mark 9:38), Jesus is forced to address one of the most common and destructive tendencies concerning humans and power. Already the disciples had forgotten, or conveniently misunderstood, the radical inclusiveness of God’s reign as they seek to limit membership to their special “club”. The other man is not “one of them” and should therefore be stopped.

I am afraid that this is a tendency to which we can all relate. The number and variety of communities that work in Jesus’ name reveals that there are infinite ways to live and proclaim the Good News. Be we just can’t seem to be able to work together. Heck there are 8 different Presbyterian Denominations in the United States alone. (EPC, PCA, OPC, Bible PC, Associate Reform PC, Korean PC, Cumberland PC, and of course the best one, the right one, us, the PCUSA). Seriously, this is sad. Diversity in itself is not a problem, as Jesus explains.

We laugh, but we should cry. We divide ourselves and separate ourselves from others because their skin is a different color, or we can't understand their language, or they part their hair on the wrong side (if they even have hair), or they choose to express their faith a little differently. Jesus is offering us a crash course in discipleship, on what it means to follow him. This passage deals with our relations with those with whom we differ.

I must admit that this is a hard passage for me to hear, and it may be tough for me because I can so easily identify with John. John is a good Presbyterian (that's PCUSA right?) because he is so concerned with doing things "decently and in order", "doing things by the book" with the right credentials, and by doing ministry "his way". To be self-revealing, I get so put out when I hear local campus ministers boasting about how many souls they have saved for Christ at their last meeting. It just makes my skin crawl! I disagree with their method of proselytizing and their message of fear and their arrogance at claiming they "saved" anyone.

See, I know I easily judge people by their credentials and I often think I know who should be in and who should be out. Then I hear Jesus say, "Do not stop him...Whoever is not against us is for us." That is hard for me to hear. I need to cut that out!

This text brings my arrogance into check and calls for me to quit being so quick to judge others by their beliefs, by their methodology, by their dress, by their social status, by their sexual orientation, by how they voted at the last presidential election, by their educational degrees. Jesus said, "Whoever is not against us is for us." I have a lot to learn. The Beloved Community of God that Jesus ushers in here in Mark's Gospel is so much larger than how I would normally define it.

I am encouraged by Edwin Markam's poem: "He drew a circle that shut me out – rebel, heretic, thing to flout; But Love and I the wit to win, we drew a circle that took him in." We draw lines and pick sides and push people out and Christ's work suffers whenever we do that. Jesus seeks that the thirsty get a drink.

Here's a question: Are we a hindrance to Christ's work, limiting who is in? At the end of the service we will sing, "Let there be peace on earth...and let it begin with me." Christ will be known in the powerful act of giving someone who is thirsty a drink of water. God's Will will be done when the prodigal child returns. Christ will be known in the breaking down barriers that separate us. God's Will will be done right here in the acts of compassion and grace offered to those who need love. Christ will be known in our welcoming others in.

Together we can do great things for God's Beloved Community when we work together for peace. May we offer Christ to the world so that Christ will be known and God will be glorified. For those who have ears to hear. Amen.

Preached by Rev. David M. Montgomery
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