

Sermon Mark 9:38-50  
Andrew Smeltz  
9/27/2015

God, Source of Life and True Wisdom, may your word guide our feet and light our paths. + Amen

If we go back to Christian beginnings, even before this was called Christianity, and Jesus' followers called themselves followers of "The Way," we will find a tradition based on the sayings and stories of Jesus of Nazareth. Mark precedes the other Gospels by a few years, and much of Mark lends itself to storytelling.

**Jesus once** sat down with his disciples to talk. They had heard the Gospel, but they weren't getting it. The disciples loved their teacher. They saw him cast out evil spirits, he healed Simon's mother-in-law of a terrible fever, he made a man who was paralyzed walk, and he taught about God's dominion in a way that seemed to give their lives meaning and opened the world before them. They knew in their hearts that he was the Messiah sent to redeem Israel, and they also wanted to be great.

John was very proud, and John boasted to Jesus,

"Teacher, we saw someone casting out evil spirits in your name, and we were trying to stop him because he wasn't following **us**."

Jesus was angry. They still didn't get it. Had they heard nothing he had said about being servants? And in their arrogance they were demeaning other people who were trying to do good?

Jesus said, "**Don't stop him!**"

Because no one

who will do a miracle in my name

will be able to speak evil about me anytime soon,

**“for the one who isn’t against us is for us.**

The disciples wondered, Was Jesus saying if people are just doing **good** that they are **really with** us? Was he saying that we should be careful about criticizing and speaking badly about others, because they too are trying to follow God?

“For whoever would give you a cup of water to drink in the name of the Messiah

because you belong to the Messiah,

I say to you, **Amen**,

truly they will *never* lose their reward.

Give even a cup of water when someone is thirsty. Say a kind word to a stranger. **SEE** that the people beside you now, your coworkers, your doctor, the merchant at the store, the person begging just off the highway, and the laborer working on the road are also doing good the best they can.

Jesus leaned into the disciples and he warned them,

“And whoever would cause one of these little ones, who believe in me, to stumble,

it’s better for that person if a millstone is tied around their neck and they were thrown into the sea.

Jesus thought, if his closest students still don’t understand, then who will? Jesus was trying to tell them that they should be serving one another, supporting each

other, and bringing the whole community into God's reign – **not** causing others believers to falter in their faith.

What's even worse, Jesus thought, they criticize others when **they themselves** continue to fail.

”And if your hand should cause you to stumble,

**cut it off!**

It's better for you to enter into life crippled

than having two hands to go into the Pit, into the unquenchable fire.

“And if your foot should cause you to stumble,

cut it off!

It's better for you to enter into life lame

than having two feet to be thrown into the Pit.

“And if your eye should cause you to stumble,

pluck it out!

It's better for you to enter into the dominion of God with one eye

than having two eyes to be thrown into the Pit...

“where their torment never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

The disciples knew that following Jesus meant acknowledging their sins, and Jesus had taught them that the worst were the self-righteous who claimed to be better than other people. The disciples wondered if real peace required self-sacrifice. Could forgiveness require that we give up something? Isn't it enough to just believe and be near Jesus? Why is he demanding that we maim ourselves in order to follow him? We know that there are places where people do not forgive each

other. There are places where instead of caring for the poor, feeding people who are hungry, protecting refugees, and healing people who are sick the powerful keep their wealth to themselves. There are places where those who are great abuse, oppress, imprison, and kill the weak in their community. There are places without water, where suffering never ends, and the fires of violence never die.

Jesus looked at his disciples' faces and said,

For everyone will be salted with fire.

We all suffer. We all fail sometimes. We are all tested. BUT, Jesus said,

“Salt is good,  
but if the salt becomes unsalty,  
with what will you season it?”

What is in your heart? Is it the salt of the Gospel? Is it salt that purifies, heals, and preserves? Is it the salt earned from tears of suffering? Is it salt that enriches the lives of others? Jesus was saying, be humble in yourselves and in your relationships with each other. Follow him. God's dominion, salvation is here from the One who is the living water, and who gives the water that we are to share: the goodness of God. Give of yourselves for others, reach out to each other, and welcome the stranger.

Have salt in yourselves

and be at peace with one another.”

Amen.