

“Recognize”
Mark 9:38-50
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
Sermon #115
9.26.21

Mark 9:38-50 CEB

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. **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. **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*. **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."

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Last week's reading from Mark's Gospel was our Savior's second prediction of death and then the subsequent bickering among the disciples about who would be the greatest among them. Of course, Jesus calls them out on their shenanigans and proves his point by welcoming a child into the circle where it was Jesus and the twelve disciples. If you can recall, Jesus not only brought the child into this circle, but embraced the child. An embrace that meant the world to the child and probably changed their life. Quite possibly, because of the embrace, the young person could have been an important participant in the life of the early Church. Yet, from that story, we discovered together that being bogged down in the weeds, the minutia, is not helpful to the ministry we have been called to in our world.

Two weeks ago, Jesus predicted his death the first time in Mark chapter 8. Again, if you can recall, Peter adamantly rebuked Jesus. He just couldn't believe that Jesus would suffer and die. He also

couldn't understand how anyone could rise from the dead. But, the Savior, the Suffering Servant, was able to teach the disciples: You must take up your cross and follow me. If you want to save your life, you must first lose it. If you seek to save your life, you will lose it.

Both stories point out the disciples' obsession with power.

Something we should also note that directly relates to today's passage occurs about 20 verses earlier in chapter 9. There is a boy possessed by a demon. And the disciples are arguing again! They can't seem to do the exorcism themselves, even though they were commissioned to do so. And the father of the boy points that out. Of course, the disciples are probably embarrassed.

Well, fast forward to the story we find ourselves in today and the disciples who are not successful at throwing out demons come across someone who is successful at throwing out demons in Jesus' name! Yet, it is someone they don't know and they try to stop them.

So let me get this straight: The disciples bicker because they couldn't cast out demons. Then, they tried to restrain someone who was actually doing the LORD's work of casting out demons in Jesus' name, BUT wasn't following the disciples.

Power. Like Mark 8:27-38 and Mark 9:30-37, the disciples are STILL obsessed with power AND they are still not welcoming those outside their small circle. In other words, they failed to understand the lesson in the previous story involving Jesus embracing the young child. Because the disciples failed at throwing out demons,

they attempted to sabotage the work of the person ministering in Jesus' name because they weren't playing by the disciples' rules. It's another failed power grab by the disciples because Jesus is too smart to fall for it.

Have you ever experienced what happened to this person the disciples tried to stop? You know you're doing what you're called to do and, by the Spirit's power, you are successful. But others attempted to sabotage you? Sabotage is another power grab. The disciples have been arguing about power for many verses and now, they are acting out in a dangerous way: They are attempting to restrain someone who is doing vital ministry in Jesus' name, which, if you haven't noticed, is not in the name of the disciples.

The disciples' attempt to stop someone from casting out evil spirits in Jesus' name shows us that all of us have this dangerous

tendency for a petty desire for control, recognition, and reward.¹ R. Alan Culpepper has some thoughts on this passage. The disciples, while they had been called as apostles and granted authority to minister to others, including casting out demons in the name of Jesus, foolishly thought they were the only ones who could do this. No one else. The disciples tricked themselves into thinking that they were “given the status of brokers in Jesus’ coming kingdom”.² These disciples took it upon themselves to be the “holier than thou” gatekeepers who could grant the gift of healing to whoever they thought lived up to their lousy expectations. That is, they thought they could do Jesus’ job better than he could. Instead of seeing the person throwing out demons in Jesus’ name as an ally in the greater struggle against evil, they saw them as a threat to their own inflated egos.

¹ R. Alan Culpepper. *Mark*. Smyth & Helwys: Macon, 2007. p.323.

² Ibid.

Our churches have fallen into this trap. Many of us have seen ourselves as the power brokers for Jesus instead of the cross bearers for Jesus. People who have been on the margins for so long are viewed as the other and as a threat to the status quo. Because, God forbid, someone is doing meaningful ministry apart from the way we've *always* done it. God forbid someone who happens to be many decades younger than we are has a different approach to ministry. God forbid someone who happens to have darker skin color than we do is following the call. God forbid someone who isn't married to a person of the opposite sex or has discovered they have a different gender expression than what they were assigned at birth is a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. God forbid we let any of this happen! We must restrain them! "Teacher, we saw someone throwing demons out in your name, and we tried to stop them because they weren't following us!!!!"

It's a power grab. Just like the disciples. And our loving Savior calls us to a different way of life. Jesus calls us to denial of self. No, I'm not saying to avoid enjoying life. God made this world and called it good and called humanity very good. No, I'm not saying to never smile and dance and enjoy your favorite food and drinks. This self-denial means denying the selfishness that has plagued our global family since the beginning of time when our parents ate the apple in the garden. Self-denial means to examine, TRULY EXAMINE ourselves and our motivations in every situation. Yet, just because we are always serving others doesn't mean we are always doing the LORD's work. There are plenty of people who cloak their selfishness in volunteerism. But, we do realize that when serving our Savior, the Suffering Servant, some sacrifice is required.

And part of that sacrifice is knowing that there are no limits to God's love. And the Spirit moves in people we least expect. Certainly, we

will never understand the big picture. Only God can because God is the Master Orchestrator who sees, knows, and has created the big picture. It's not up to us to be the power-grabbing gatekeepers like the disciples tried to be in order to sabotage meaningful ministry by someone outside our circle. It is, however, up to us to be faithful cross bearers of our LORD.

Go out in our Savior's name. Go out and be faithful. Go out and confront those evil spirits plaguing our world. Go out and know that God's love is limitless and there will be others doing vital ministry in Jesus' name, too.

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.