

## **Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 29 2024**

### **James 5:13-20; Gospel: Mark 9:38-50**

What is one thing that if someone does it differently from you, it's just plain wrong? I've known people who felt that way about folding towels. What's the right way to do it? Or perhaps how to load the dishwasher. What else?

If you have one of those things, then you can relate to John in today's reading. He and his brother James were given the nickname Sons of Thunder in Mark. We don't quite know what that means, but we do know that John is likely to just dive right into the thick of things with utter certainty bordering on obliviousness.

He is almost boasting of stopping someone from casting out demons in Jesus' name because "they were not following us." They weren't doing it like us! They were doing a deed of power in Jesus' name, but it needed to be stopped because they didn't do things the way we did so obviously that was wrong. You can almost hear his boasting tone and looking around at his fellow disciples with a bit of a smile, "Gotcha! I'm getting the gold star for this."

But that's not what happens, is it? You can almost hear Jesus' sigh. "If they are doing things to help others in my name but it isn't with your group or just like you- that's okay! Don't hinder or attack their work!"

Jesus then goes on to teach us more about what this reign of God looks like. What is important in that reign.

First is the recognition that those who are in the reign of God are not just those believers who you gather with. There are others "doing deeds of power" in the name of Jesus who don't hang with us. Who may do things differently. And while they may not follow you, they do indeed follow Jesus.

Who might those be for us? The Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists. Our friends at the Shueyville Church. Evangelicals. If they are doing deeds of power in the name of Jesus, exhibiting the reign of God, don't try and get in their way.

To be followers of Jesus is to be in community with others. James gets at this in the second reading. There are at least eight references to "among you" in that text. The assumption of a community of people that is actively caring for each other- praying, singing, confessing sins to one another, bringing one

another back to the truth of Christ when we wander. Kind of like Jesus did for John in the gospel today. Woah, slow your roll.

Because the way in which we live in community with one another and the world is vital to our witness. And what does it say to the world when we as followers of Jesus lead with denigrating or belittling what other followers of Jesus do just because we don't do it that way? Is that likely to bring in more believers or turn them off.

Jesus says, if you want to be afraid of something- don't be afraid of another group of believers doing good things for others in my name. Rather, be afraid of causing someone who is new in the faith (one of these little ones who believe in me) to stumble. Literally to scandalize them. How? Sandalize them by the way you act, by your language, by your attitude. Trip them up and cause them to fall away or reject this reign of God because of how we have presented and represented that reign to them.

You want to be worried about something? Jesus says. Be worried about living in peace as a community of believers. Be worried about your own faithfulness to the reign of God. Be worried about your own life in the community of faith you are in.

One of the things it means to follow Jesus is to be alert for where God is already active in the world. To recognize we don't have a corner on the Truth that is Jesus. Jesus is already out there and doing things. Sometimes not even through his followers. We've worked over the last few years to try and improve our vision of that during our offering times.

So even if we disagree on things that aren't essential- can we acknowledge the ways in which they are doing deeds of power that help people in the name of Jesus? I take issue with some of the theology present in Financial Peace- but I know folks who have had their lives and their faith transformed for the better because of it. I can recognize that a deed of power has been done in the name of Jesus.

Can we recognize our unity in Christ within the diversity of how we live out that belief?

We remember what has come just before this passage. What does it mean to follow Jesus? Pick up your cross. What does it mean to be great in the reign of Heaven? It's being last of all and servant of all. Who's on the team? Anyone doing deeds of power in Jesus' name even if they aren't doing it like us.

And how is any of this possible? Because we have been seasoned by Jesus. We have been preserved/saved by Jesus. And like salt cannot lose its NA/CLness, once we have been seasoned by Jesus through the waters of baptism, through the Word that comes to us in scripture, in conversation, in proclamation, in song, once we have been seasoned that will never go away.

Our primary purpose is to follow Jesus. To keep our eyes on him, not what other folk are doing. To go where he goes and proclaim the reign of God as he does. To be an outpost of that reign (as best we can) in our little corner of the world. We do all of this for the sake of our neighbors who God loves and we strive to love in the same way.

But in the end, it's all about Jesus. Without whom none of this is possible. But with whom, all things are possible.