

The Nineteenth Sunday of Pentecost

October 4, 2015

Prayer of the Day: Mercifully grant, O God, that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts, for without your help we are unable to please you; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Alleluia! (Philippians 2:10)

Sermon Text: Mark 9:38-50

It looked like it was scripted just for television. Two ice-skaters, whose upbringings were anything but the same. One young lady came from the East Coast and had a father work three jobs just to pay for her ice skating classes. The other, a tough-nosed lady from the West Coast, whose father's injury left him unable to work, whose mother supported them with her low-income, had gained her ice skating skills from the public ice rink at the local the mall. It was sweet and innocent versus tough and tenacious. It was middle-income versus low-income. It was Nancy Kerrigan versus Tonya Harding.

On January 6, 1994, America's finest met in Detroit for the United States Ice-Skating Championships. Winner not only received a gold medal, but also earned a spot on the 1996 United States Olympic team. Almost 50% of Americans watched to see if Harding could finally defeat Kerrigan and become the world's best ice skater.

Kerrigan had just finished her warm-ups. Before the competition, she skated over to the locker-room tunnel, walked off the ice, through a curtain, and was found crumpled on the floor. Cameras did not catch what happened, but court records reveal the events. Tonya Harding had persuaded a friend to crack Nancy Kerrigan's knee with a police baton.

Mark 9:38-50

³⁸ "Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

³⁹ "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

⁴² "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where

" 'their worm does not die,
and the fire is not quenched.'

⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire.

⁵⁰ "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.

Two American ladies, both competing to represent the same country against the rest of the world. How could rivalry reach such painful depths? What emotions compelled a teammate to so violently sabotage the other's career— even to the extent that personal health was harmed?

Something that lurks inside each of us. Something which urges us to hurt others in ways far more painful than a police baton. Something which leaves longer lasting marks than a bruised knee. Something which stops at nothing to make sure that no one gets more glory, more praise, more honor and respect than you. What is it? Jealousy, the same jealousy with which the disciples struggle. The same jealousy Jesus removes by asking: **ARE YOU AT PEACE WITH EACH OTHER?** *Put aside jealousy. Be salted with the Word.*

You wonder how much peace the disciples had with each other— if any tensions existed between them, if any resented another. I mean, you have witnessed their seemingly bizarre behavior over these past two weeks. Two separate times Jesus prepares his disciples for Good Friday's horrific events. He tells them: *the Son of Man will be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and he must be killed* ([Mark 8:31](#)). A few days later he says again: *The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him* ([Mark 9:31](#)).

Remember how the disciples respond? The first time, Peter takes Jesus aside, wags his finger, ordering him to stop talking about death ([Mark 8:32](#)). When the disciples hear Jesus predict his death again, they squabble over who was the best disciple in their group! ([Mark 9:34](#))

What moves them to act this way? I mean, two times Jesus says that he will suffer and die— and the people to whom God sends him will do the killing. How do the disciples respond? By pouring out sympathy? By asking if Jesus will continue marching to Calvary even though he knows what lies ahead? No, they wonder how much glory they can expect to receive when Jesus stops talking about death and reunites the Jewish nation! ([Mark 10:35-37](#); [Acts 1:6](#)).

It almost sounds silly to think that jealousy would move the disciples to act this way. Yet, when John **[sees] a man driving out demons in [Jesus] name**, what does he do? “[...] **we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.**” I mean, why does John command that man to stop? What was the reason? “Jesus, we told him to stop, because he is not one of us.”

What does that mean: “one of us?” Maybe that is not too difficult to answer, is it? It is all too tempting to look down on others because they do not measure up to our self-determined greatness, right? After all, what is John saying? This man uses the name of Jesus properly, but he is not part of the exclusive Twelve disciples, the ones who travel with Jesus, eat and sleep with him. This man seems to know truths about Jesus, but he is not actually sitting with Jesus, learning and hearing and studying such divine words. This man is driving out demons, but Jesus did not specifically authorize him to do so— like he did the disciples ([Mark 6:7](#)).

It is really not too difficult to image what John is thinking, is it? Do we ever have similar thoughts? Yes, my fellow believer is giving some good suggestions, but he has only been here in this church a few years; I have been here for many more years! So, I can ignore his thoughts! Yes, a person younger than I gave a wonderful idea, but why listen to someone who has not been around long enough to experience the world's many struggles as I have? Surely I know more than him! Look at my powerful title; look his weak title. What not listen to me?!

That list could really go on, could it not? How many times we simply refuse to work with one another because our pride feels challenged, because our pride determines that we are better than everyone else!

Does jealousy ever stop there? Does it ever end with personal grudges, stubbornness, the strong desire to listen to no one? No, jealousy's cancer eats away at something farther below the surface. Jealousy knows no depths, stops at nothing to ensure that you stand in power above everyone else. Even if jealousy moves you to harm that specific individual or even harm the your fellow believers all around you, it stops clawing and scratching at nothing until every wish of yours is granted— even if that means you drive away others from Jesus. Not just drive others away, but jealousy can even lead you to plug your ears to the Savior's Words because those Words do not match up with your selfish wants, because you want to listen to no one other than yourself!

So, **ARE YOU AT PEACE WITH EACH OTHER?** Jesus recognizes jealousy's terrible consequences. **"No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us."** How does this man drive out demons? Does he curse Jesus and summon Satan? Is he practicing some sort of witchcraft? No! He uses the name of Jesus; he is confessing his trust, his faith, in the Almighty God who triumphs over the devil!

That is really what plucks out that poisonous root of jealousy. How are the disciples connected? How are we all connected? We are connected by Jesus to Jesus! *Whoever is not against us*— not whoever is against *me* or against *you*— but against *us*, that is, me, you, and Jesus. All of you are connected by faith to the same one Savior!

Jealousy is removed by remembering that you all belong to Jesus. The King of heaven and earth— the One through whom the entire universe is made, the Creator who knit you together in the womb, is not too busy, too powerful, too selfish to suffer death at your expense! No, in selfless love, Jesus stoops down from heaven's throne to die separated from his Father—and to do this in order to connect you to himself. That he connects you to him so that you, a Christian, someone considered so little in the eyes of the world can be exalted and brought up to the powerfully eternal kingdom of God— how selflessly amazing is that?

Knowing that God himself exalts you to the status of "forgiven" or "child of God," that he gives all of this to you free of charge, how do you respond? How do you live life? In grateful, selfless thanks! A group of you, all connected to the same Lord, all receiving the same heaven, how do you treat each other? **YOU LIVE AT PEACE WITH EACH OTHER, putting aside jealousy.**

Yes, you might feel those jealous struggles raging within you. You and I still live in a world that wants to be first, wants power, demands respect. That is why many speed up to get ahead of you on the road— just to be first. That is why kids run to the head of the line, even if it means pushing you aside— just so that they are first in line. That is why people gossip at work, backstab, slander, cut down— just so that they appear better than others. This is the world you and I live in. You and I see these things played out in life time and time again— at work, on television, among your kids and grandkids— it will be a struggle to put aside jealousy.

Yet, your God does not leave you without help. He tells you: *Be salted with the Word.* **"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."** Salt preserves. Jesus compares his Word to

salt—it preserves faith. As Christians, you have that Word of God at work in you, preserving your faith. God’s Word tells you how to protect yourself from the evil one, how to protect your heart from immersing itself in the ways of the world, how to protect your Christian identity so that you continue serving Christ and one another in selfless love.

That Word of God keeps you focused on life’s most important truth: Jesus Christ died for your sins and the sins of the world! You believe that Jesus is your Savior from sin. Yet, never forget that he shares this truth with others too.

[I]f anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. Yes, sinful pride will tell you that “these little ones” do not deserve all the great news that you get to hear. Yes, it might not come out in those exact words, but that thought can come out in actions. Selfishness can grow irritated that children make noise during service. Selfishness can lead us to become frustrated that children and toddlers do not sit and stand and sing like us much-older adults. Selfishness can completely forget that children are here because Jesus loves them too— just like Jesus loves you.

These “little ones” do not just refer to children either. It also refers to people who may have just started worshipping with you. It refers to those younger than you, maybe not as intelligent or sharp-minded as you, those who may act a little bit differently than you. Selfishness can move us to grow so irritated that others are not just like us, so that we say something really harsh, or make someone so uncomfortable.

That selfishness can do something far more terrible: lead one of those little ones into sin. The word Jesus uses is: *to stumble*. He means that if you consider someone too little, too insignificant to receive God’s Word your words and actions can lead a “little one” to stumble into unbelief.

When that jealousy rises up, *be salted with the Word*. Read the love God has for you. Be reminded that your God dies for you sins so that you can be perfect—just like him! These “little ones” are here because they too are learning about Jesus, your Jesus, their Jesus.

Be patient with one another, just as God patiently forgives you. Instead of driving away, consider how you may bring others closer to God. Instead of frowning, smile. Instead of scolding, what words can you give to encourage your fellow believers? Do you have that ear to listen? Do you have life experience you are share with others? Can you simply relate or hug or show compassion to those who need it? You do not need the right words to say all the time. You do not need to change your entire personality. You do not have to feel forced to have to say something. Rather, reflect that selfless love God showed you, that same selfless love you show to others!

After all, Jesus brings you peace with God. Through the Word he reminds you of the peace of his forgiveness. You do not have to fear standing before God’s throne, ready to hear the hammer-blow of damnation. You do not have to worry if you are good enough to go to heaven. Jesus has done it all for you. He has made you blameless. He gives you peace with God!

The peace you have with God is the peace you show to one another. There is no fighting for better positions. There is no cutting down opposing ideas. Instead, their selfless love, tending to the very different, very important needs of those around you.

Most of all, remember what Jesus has made you. You are connected to him; you have the one and same Lord and Savior. **BE AT PEACE WITH EACH OTHER!** *Put aside jealousy. Be salted with the Word.*