

KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH



Mark 9:38-50

A Godly View of Others

Like me, I'm sure you take some safety precautions in your life. You buckle your seat belt when you are in the car. We put dangerous cleaning supplies in a place where young children cannot find them. We lock the doors to our homes at night and when we are not home. We look both ways before we cross the street. These safety measures just make sense.

In our Gospel Lesson, Jesus talks to us about the safety measures we should take as we interact with others. It is true that our world is filled with physical dangers. It is also true that our world is filled with spiritual dangers. Jesus wants us to be concerned about the spiritual welfare of ourselves, but also of others. Our actions should not cause divisions and sins. As Jesus said in the final verse of the lesson, **"Be at peace with each other."**

The encouragement to be at peace with others began when John confessed to Jesus that the disciples had seen a man driving out demons in Jesus' name and they told the man to stop because he wasn't one of the disciples. In the verses before our text, Jesus encouraged the disciples to be great by being servants. He illustrated this by telling them to welcome a child was an act of great service.

Perhaps this pricked John's conscience. *"We didn't do that with a man who was driving out demons in your name."* Instead of encouraging this man, the disciples tried to stop him.

I'm not sure where I found this information, but the last time I preached on this text, my sermon referred to *the false-consensus effect* or *false-consensus bias*. *The false-consensus bias* is a term psychologists use to describe the common idea that everyone thinks like me — not me personally, but everyone thinks that everyone else thinks the same as we do. It leads to that frustration that arises when we realize that there people in the world who don't think the same way we do or don't do things the same way we do.

Jesus' lesson was clear: not every believer is like you, but that doesn't mean they are wrong. The man to whom John refers was able to do miracles in Jesus' name, therefore he was most certainly a believer. He may not have been working with the disciples, but he wasn't working against them either.

"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." Acts of faith matter to Jesus! Even small acts of faith — giving a cup of water to help someone — are important. Acts of faith that are different than what you may do matter to Jesus, even if you may not have done them. Acts of faith that seem less significant than what you do, matter to Jesus.

Your normal is not the only normal. Other Christians also believe in Jesus. They too are cleansed in the blood of Christ. They are also have new hearts that want to serve Jesus. Sometimes the way God made them will lead them to do different things than what you do or to have different opinions about matters. Don't be frustrated and certainly don't try to stop them. We are on the same team; our variety of gifts and insights is part of God's plan to bless us, not a cruel joke.

Learning to accept the differences among Christians is important so that we can **"Be at peace with each other."**

But then Jesus adds to the lesson. Not only do we need to guard the way we think of others, but need to guard the way we act toward others so that we don't cause them to sin. **"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, 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."**

Jesus' words are graphic, but he wanted to get your attention. Don't cause others to fall into sin. The **"little ones"** certainly refers to children. There was perhaps a child still standing with Jesus from the verses before our text. It also could refer to the **"little one"** that John referred to. The man doing miracles in Jesus' name may not have had a complete knowledge of Jesus, but that wasn't an excuse to do spiritual harm to him.

Jesus is calling on his disciples to give careful thought to their words and actions toward fellow believers. Our actions can have consequences.

There was a space shuttle that returned from a mission once that had a quarter inch pit in the glass on the cockpit. It was determined that the damage occurred when a fleck of paint that came off a satellite collided with the glass. The fleck of paint was tiny, but traveling at high speeds in space it hit the shuttle with enough force to dig into the glass.

We often drop debris that can be a horrible stumbling block to others. Our insensitive remarks, although often accidental and unintended, become flying debris that causes major damage to relationships. We may not like the way that someone is conducting his or her life. But rather than encouragement, we offer a subtle jab that does far more damage than good. In general, isn't it often easier to offer criticism than praise? These critical words — whether at church, home, or work — can tear gapping holes in our lives. They create anger and animosity. Jesus warned, **"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."**

If our exclusiveness and insensitivity aren't bad enough, look at the rest of Scripture. There is much more. In our Second Lesson from James we heard a warning to avoid being **"double-minded"** and slanderous. Double-minded Christians cannot decide if they prefer following the Lord or the world. Our impurity, filthy language, malice, and idolatry create a cloud of debris around us that can cause severe damage to our own spiritual lives or

to the lives of others. Jesus warned that the debris of sin puts us in danger of the eternal punishment of hell

The danger of sin is real. Eternal punishment awaits those who turn away from God. Jesus said that in hell **"the fire never goes out."** The Greek word for *never goes out* is pronounced *asbestos*. We use the word for a material that is resistant to heat and fire, but also that causes cancer. The fire of hell never goes out, but the burning never ends either. We must be careful that our actions don't lead to horrible consequences for others.

Of course, these words of Jesus cause all of us to shake our heads in shame for the times we have not thought of others or watched ourselves as carefully as we should have. Our actions toward others are far from perfect.

But Jesus reminds us at the end of the Lesson that **"salt is good."** He's talking about you, the salt of the earth. In Christ Jesus, you are forgiven for your sins — every single last one of them. Your guilt is gone. You are also renewed as one of Jesus' followers to **be at peace with each other**. What was handled sinfully in the past doesn't have to be repeated. Christ has set you free from your sins and enables you to see the people around you — even the ones who are not like you — as people that God loves.

Jesus wants us to take some precautions in how we deal with others. You are a member of God's kingdom. You are set free from sin. Faith in Jesus is what makes you a member of God's family. Put that faith into practice as you daily interact with others. Show the love and respect that Jesus has put into your hearts. Amen.

Pentecost 19
October 4, 2015

