**Sermon Mark 9:38-50 James 5:19-20 – 26th September 21**

**Sermon video link:** [**https://youtu.be/detzytEbL7c**](https://youtu.be/detzytEbL7c)

While Jesus is holding a child in his arms and John says to him, *“we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”* Vs 38. The disciples have just been arguing about which one of them is the greatest. They are judging each other trying to decide who is better. They don’t only judge between themselves; they are also judging other people.

The disciples don’t seem to be able to get past a particular kind of thinking. The kind of thinking that says one person is better than another, one group is better than another. The kind of thinking that divides people into those who are in and those who are out. In this case, the disciples are in and the person driving out demons in the name of Jesus is out. This kind of thinking says that if you want to have anything to do with Jesus, then you must be in the ‘in group’. If you’re not in the ‘in group’, you cannot call on the name of Jesus for any kind of help.

Jesus is still holding a little child as he says, *“Do not stop him, for 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”* Vs 39,40. Who is in and who is out is not as clear cut as we may think. Jesus is holding a little child. The child is a symbol. It is a symbol of those who are dependant and vulnerable. The child is also a symbol of those who are little in their faith. Those who are still growing and maturing. Those who need all the nurturing and teaching they can get.

Jesus is holding a little child in his arms and reminding us that all of us begin our journey into the kingdom of God as little children. We begin by knowing nothing, understanding very little and needing all the nurturing, love, compassion and teaching we can get. Maybe the only thing we begin with is to know the name of Jesus. Maybe the only thing we begin with is to know that there is something that the disciples of Jesus have got that we want and crave in our own lives, but we still can’t quite put our finger on it. Maybe the only thing we know is that calling on the name of Jesus makes a positive difference.

The last thing a person needs as they begin their journey toward faith in Christ is for people to put roadblocks in the way. The last thing they need is for people to treat them as second-class citizens of the kingdom. The last thing they need is for people to look down on them. Jesus knows how fragile faith can be. Jesus knows how easily people’s faith can be destroyed and he warns the disciples and us that one of the worst things we can do is to cause someone who is little in the faith to stumble.

Many people use exaggeration to make a point. We say things like, “they had enough food to feed an army” or “I have a million things to do.” Jesus also uses exaggeration to show he is deadly serious, saying, “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” vs 42. Causing people to stumble in their faith is deadly serious.

Those who are taking their first steps toward faith in Christ are very important to Jesus. Those who are struggling in their faith are important to Jesus. Jesus wants us to welcome them, show them hospitality, make them feel at home and treat them as part of the family,

Still holding a little child in his arms, Jesus starts talking about those who already have faith. The truth is that all of us are vulnerable to losing our faith. All of us in many ways are still children in our walk with God and it is only when we reach heaven that we will reach full maturity. Our faith can be destroyed by the words and actions of our brothers and sisters in the faith. Our faith can also be destroyed by our actions.

Jesus continues to use exaggeration as he says we are better off cutting off our hands and feet and plucking out our eyes to stop ourselves from sinning than to stumble and fall away from faith and end up in hell. Jesus is pointing out that faith in him is no small thing. Faith in Christ is a matter of life and death. Without faith in Christ, we are all destined to hell. Therefore, we should not do anything that may cause us or anyone else to lose our faith.

Jesus is speaking out of love, compassion, and genuine concern for our souls. We know this because he has just told his disciples that he will be killed and rise after three days. Jesus is so concerned with his disciple’s eternal salvation that he is on his way to Jerusalem to give his life for them. He is on his way to give his life not only for his disciples but for all people, even those who don’t know him yet, even those who are still his enemies. That is how serious he is about saving our lives.

Instead of destroying the faith of others, we are called to be salt to other people. Salt was a preservative in the ancient world where there was no such thing as refrigeration. Instead of destroying the faith of others, we are to preserve the faith of others. If a brother or sister wanders from the truth we should try to bring them back and save them from eternal death. Instead of treating others like they are not good enough and don’t belong, we are to make peace with them and welcome them with loving and compassionate open arms. Like the arms of Jesus holding a little child.

Amen.

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz