

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Title: “Well-Seasoned in Christ Jesus”

Sermon Text: Mark 9:38-40

³⁸ John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." ³⁹ But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ For the one who is not against us is for us.

Sermon Hymn: LSB 699 [*I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say*]

Prayer: With the Gospel of Jesus Christ continually in our hearts and on our lips may we deal gently and humbly with others.

Sermon Outline:

- I. We encourage the weak in faith (vs. 38-41).
- II. We cause no one to stumble (vs. 42-48).
- III. We are filled with the WORD (vs. 49-50).

Dear friends in Jesus Christ, our Lord- our Heavenly Father’s grace, mercy, and peace to you through Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

There is certainly a lot to our Gospel reading for this Sunday from Mark 9. For the sake of clarity let’s break it up into three segments. Then take a look at how these segments are all intertwined in one, single message our Lord gives us. First we have John, the disciple, addressing his teacher, Jesus, about a man who was casting out demons in Jesus’ name. John and the others didn’t like it because that man was not a one of them. And, Jesus sets John straight.

The second segment is Jesus giving the warning about causing “one of these little ones” who believes in Him to sin. Jesus stated that it would be better for a millstone to be hung on the neck of a person who does such a thing and to be thrown into the sea. And, that if there is anything in this life that will cause a person to lose his eternal salvation it is better the person sacrifice that ‘anything’ and keep his eternal salvation.

The third segment involves Jesus’ figure of speech using salt.

Before we go into length about each of these segments and the beautiful way in which they are connected, I’d like for you to take a look at the sermon outline in your bulletin. Keep

in mind the title of this sermon is “We Are Well-Seasoned in Christ Jesus.” We are believers in Jesus Christ, brought to faith by the Holy Spirit working through the Word of our Lord. We are fully pardoned, that is, released from the eternal consequence of our sin, and have been made heirs of the riches of Heaven. But, as well, as Ephesians 2:10 states, “*We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*”

Then in the body of the sermon outline, there are three ‘good works’ mentioned. The first, we encourage the weak in faith. The second, we cause no one to stumble. We do everything we can to help other believers, the weak and the strong in faith, from falling into sin and making shipwreck of the gift of faith they’ve been given. Thirdly, we are filled with the Word and we stay that way. To do less than encourage other believers is sinful. To cause someone to stumble, even in the slightest, is sinful. To do anything less than to remain filled with the Word is sinful.

In considering just these three works and that we must keep them perfectly, that’s very overwhelming. We’re sinful. We can’t help it. I mean, many of the ways we like to have fun and enjoy life are sinful. Each of us stumble a lot ourselves. So, how can we always make sure we are encouraging and preventing others from stumbling themselves?

Is Jesus expecting too much of us? Let’s consider the first segment of this Gospel account, we’ll start there. Verse 38- “*John said to him, ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’*”

The way which John addresses Jesus gives us insight into the disciples’ relationship with Jesus. First of all he calls Jesus ‘teacher.’ Second, John’s question is the kind of question a student asks when he’s looking for information and approval from his teacher.

The disciples saw this man casting out demons using the power of Jesus’ name. The reason John and the others had issue with this is because this man was not acting “officially” as a representative of Jesus, they thought. Now, the man casting out demons, we know nothing about him besides what we are told, and that is he was casting out demons in Jesus’ name. We know nothing of the faith in his heart. We know nothing of his intentions behind it. All we know is that what he was doing was helping people, and helping people in Jesus’ name.

If John was looking for a pat on the back from his teacher for recognizing what this man was doing and trying to stop him, he wasn't going to get that pat on the back from Jesus. Jesus considered what John and the others attempted to do about this man as negative behavior on behalf of the disciples.

Negative behavior? Let's bring this situation into the reality of our own lives. What if we were to witness the same sort of thing, someone none of us know doing amazing and powerful things in Jesus' name? Wouldn't we question it? Wouldn't we be concerned that the person has the wrong intention? Wouldn't we be worried that this someone would be giving others the wrong impression of who Jesus is?

Yet, just as Jesus said to John and the others, *“Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us.”* What? But, but, Jesus, what if this man really isn't a believer? Yet, what Jesus was revealing is that even though this someone's knowledge may have been limited, he was still on the right side of the fence.

Jesus goes on, *“For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.”* Friends, true faith in the heart of a person is made evident through the actions of that person. This is all we are able to go on when it comes to others, what they say, and what they do. What else Jesus was getting at is that a good and kind deed done to one of His own is, indeed, a good and kind deed to Him also. Yes, even a good and kind deed coming from the heart of one extremely weak in his faith. Keep all this in mind as we move onto the second segment of this Gospel account.

Jesus goes on *“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.”*

A conditional statement like this by Jesus catches the attention of any of us. The phrase Jesus uses, “little ones” includes not just small children, but also the infants in faith, regardless of physical age. The picture here refers to anyone who causes another person, weak or strong in faith, to stumble and fall away from faith in Jesus. The Lord holds that person accountable who injures another's faith in Him. A millstone is a large stone turned by a donkey. A stone like

that hung around a person's neck and dragging him to the bottom of the sea is a sure way of removing him from the scene before harming someone else's faith.

Jesus continues on, if your hand, your foot, your eye, or anything at all keeps you from entering the Kingdom of Heaven which has been promised by Jesus Himself, well, it is better that you sacrifice such a thing than end up in hell.

Falling from faith is eternally deadly friends. None of us want to fall from faith in Jesus, and none of us want to cause someone else to. It may require turning off the television, changing a bad habit, or throwing away a particular magazine or newspaper. If such a sacrifice seems unbearable consider the alternative. Yes, maintaining your faith in Jesus Christ, and encouraging others in their faith is greater than any other goal in life.

As I mentioned before friends, this sort of thing coming from Jesus certainly catches our attention. It's overwhelming for sinners! We can't help but to go a day, an hour, a minute, without sinning. The issue is not our hands, our feet, our eyes, it is our hearts. That is where our sin comes from. And, that sinning is so often noticed by others around us. It comes out of the depths of our hearts and is made evident on the outside by what we do and say. And, if sinning, or influencing others to sin, is what's going to destroy our faith or the faith of others, we're in real trouble! Is the Lord expecting way too much of us?

Well, let's just move onto the third segment of our Gospel. Verses 49-50, *"For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."*

The picture of salt used as a preservative is found numerous times in Scripture. In Matthew 5:13 Jesus calls His disciples the salt of the earth. In this Gospel reading salt is something in the disciples. What is this salt Jesus is talking about? And, what does Jesus mean *"everyone will be salted with fire"*? Sounds harsh and painful, and, in fact, it is harsh. Being salted in the way Jesus speaks of is a painful thing going in, but a joyous one coming from.

What is this salt Jesus is talking about? It is the two-edged sword, the Word of the Lord, Himself. It is the Lord Himself. It is what He is all about and what He has accomplished for each of us and for everyone else on this planet. This Word is powerful. It does what the Lord intends.

This Word of the Lord cuts, it kills, and it heals and makes alive again all those who hear it. It is the Word that reveals to us our wretchedness, our deep seated sinfulness, and our hopeless, endless road to hell. Yet, it is also the Word that has brought us out of that very same bondage of our sinfulness and eternal condemnation and into a living hope of full pardon from guilt and Promise of eternal life instead.

The very salt Jesus is talking of is the Word that reveals to us that each and everyone of us deserves for a millstone to hung on our neck and thrown into the sea. It is the Word that reveals that we do not always encourage those who are weak in their faith. It is the Word that reveals to us that we do stumble and that we cause others to stumble.

Yet, it is also the very salt Jesus is talking about that reveals to us the very millstone we deserve around our necks that Jesus has completely taken away from us and allowed to be tied around His own. He was the One who took the millstone and allowed Himself to be thrown into the sea. This all happened in His horrible suffering and the tremendous shedding of His own innocent blood upon the Cross.

It is also the Word that we so often reject in our sinfulness, that we prevent from filling us. Yet, it is also the Word, the Lord Himself, who has come to us and filled us full. It is the Word we hear, it is the Word connected with the water that was used in our baptisms. Yes, friends, in our baptisms our old selves did drown. Yet, the pain of that death, Jesus took all upon Himself. Jesus' body was laid in a tomb, but did remain there. He was raised by His Father in Heaven, and, we were raised with Him to a new life, with a new heart and mind. A new heart and mind that has full and loving concern for the faith of all others, yes, even those who are extremely weak in their faith.

A new life in Christ is what this salt Jesus was speaking of has given each of us. Yes, to hear all the Lord told His disciples about encouraging others in their faith, causing no one to stumble in their faith, and being filled with His Word, is overwhelming for us sinners. Yet, to also hear that the Lord has freely, graciously, and lovingly made us into those who do have loving concern for the faith of others is joyfully overwhelming! This is who we are! And, by the time we have heard that this is who we are, we is already who we have been made to be.

Friends, the Lord does not give the gift of Himself in parts, or in bits and pieces. He gives Himself completely. Everything He requires of us, everything He expects of us, He has

given to us completely, for the sake of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. You got it all, right there in your baptism.

Okay, so what about the rest of my life? I mean, my baptism happened years ago? And, I've sinned a lot since then. Friends, "Immanuel", the God with us, He is with us. He is with us in His living Word, and He is the living Word, right here with us (tonight) this morning. He is with us in body and blood, in a mysterious, but sure way, in the bread and wine we are about to partake. Just as the Lord came to be with us on that quiet night we now celebrate at Christmas, He is in no less way, with us now. And, He is continually keeping us, by the Holy Spirit working through that salt, His Word, filled to brim and overflowing with the Word He expects us to be filled with.

Jesus says in the last verse of this Gospel account, "*Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.*" Friends, we may rest assured, it is His Promise, He has filled us with salt. We are well-seasoned. He continually makes us filled with His Word. That Word continually makes us anew in Him ready and willing to do all good works He has prepared for us to do.

"Be at peace with one another", Jesus says. Being made anew in Him this is what we desire. We may be at peace with one another, yes, even with those who are weak in faith. For the only credit to be given is given to our Lord who has done it all for us. Amen.