

Sermon Sunday 26th September 2021

Mark 9:38: 38 to end; James 5: 13 to end

We often hear phrases today such as ‘they are not one of us’ or ‘either you are with us or against us.’ These groups or sayings demonstrate how we as human beings can be very clique which has been described as natural where a group of people develop a sense of group identity and go on to erect barriers or rules to identify who does what and even go as far to say who does not belong.

I hope you agree with me that this does not have a place in the Christian Church although I have to say the Church does have rules many of which I moan about and find frustrating but I did swear to obey them when I was Licensed as a Reader but that is an aside, the rules do change but it is a long frustrating process.

We see in Marks Gospel reading today this ‘not one of us’ approach from the disciples. In any religious group or faith there is a tendency, our own included, ‘to say I am right and you are wrong.’ This attitude has led to many wars, the killing of people, exile, control over people and so much more. So, when John asks Jesus about the man driving out demons in Jesus’ name and said we told him to stop because ‘he is not one of us’ Jesus’ response is very clear ‘whatever his background, he is engaged in good work.’ He is on the side of good against evil. This openness is developed further by Jesus in verses 40 and 41. **READ THE VERSES.** He is saying that the disciples will receive help and assistance from people or groups who may not openly show they are Christians but will prove to be supporters rather than opponents. So, the ‘not one of us’ approach is wrong. So please do not look for the negative in a person but the positive.

The next verses, 42 to 50, are grouped by the words stumbling, fire and salt. Jesus is trying to teach his disciples that their job will not be easy and they will stumble, so a lax, easy-going approach will not work, as it is not taking the Kingdom of God and Gods work here on earth seriously. We have to take Gods work here on earth seriously in bringing others to God and changing their lives. I know I have stumbled on my journey with God and I have had to confess this in prayer and taking action not to stumble over the same problem again. Confession can be direct with God or by seeking another Christian to discuss and pray with but remember forgiveness is from the Lord our God and the Lord our God alone. Every service we are lead in a prayer of confession, we have just said it; I challenge you the next time to seriously think what this means to receive God's forgiveness and to confess fully.

Jesus then talks about fire and the cutting out of people before it is to late. It is never to late to save one's spiritual life. The alternative being fire or hell. Scholars believe Jesus is using the rubbish dump outside Jerusalem known a Gehenna where rubbish was burned a graphic example of how much is at stake. The fire on that rubbish tip never went out and Jesus tells them 'Their worm never dies and the fire is never quenched.' To the Jews at that time fire and worms represented great pain. So, Jesus is being very graphic here referring to hell and how our eyes, hands and feet which can be conduits of sin causing us to stumble should be figuratively not practically cut of or plucked out. Gone is the cuddly Jesus, here He is being very severe in His teaching. We have to hold good to our faith

Jesus then goes on to refer to salt and in verse 50 of 'how good it is.' It is confusing to say the least. Salt we know can flavour and preserve food especially meat and it is able to extinguish fires. The word salt was also

used by Rabbis to mean wisdom. Jesus is referring to salt, I believe, to show that we have to make a difference in the world in which we live by making a change to the current flavour of the world which to say the least is not very flavoury at the moment. Salt changes flavour and preserves so we like salt must change the world and halt the moral decay.

James in his Letter tells us how we should seek prayer and God's forgiveness and healing; healing in forgiveness for our sins and seeking physical healing when unwell, for ourselves and those we pray for. Remember both forgiveness and healing come from God. In verse 19 James sums up what Jesus is telling the disciples how all people can be saved. READ VERSE 19. Prayer and positive acts can and will save ourselves and those we pray for; we do this by taking the initiative and in love when we meet people where they are in their lives, never saying 'they aren't one of us' and pray for them to bring them to God and His forgiveness

A life without Christian faith and wisdom is not something we should ever contemplate or think about. However hard the job where we maintain our own Christian saltiness, we can stop conflict and preserve peace in our own lives and the lives of those around us and bring them to God.

Let us pray. Lord save us from the casual and uncaring approach to the Kingdom of God. Help us to be good disciples in all we do, think and say and to walk with You in this world and the next. Amen