

Pentecost 17, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Mark 9: 42 – 48

We are this day in the Gospel lesson I just read, from Mark chapter 9, especially that interesting middle paragraph, starting at verse 42. Read it over, see what you think—and the Lord be with you.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, you have called us, and we are yours. Give us the strength and the courage to follow you all the days of our lives, let the witness we share with the world be sincere and loving and graceful. Bless us Lord by touching the hearts of our children and grandchildren, and bring us all at last into your eternal kingdom. Lord Jesus in your name alone we put our trust, in your name alone we pray, AMEN.

Fifteen years ago, in Indiana, my wife Mary and I lived a few houses down from a young couple who had a small child, and we became nodding, back yard acquaintances with them. That wasn't hard to do, after all at that time Mary and I were *also* a young couple with small children—time does have a way of moving you along, I'm afraid. Anyway, this couple our neighbors down the street, they had never been to church in their lives, never, and they had *absolutely no* idea what went on in a room like this one on a Sunday morning. So we invited them—many times, always casually, no pressure, “Hey guys, you'd be welcome, hope to see you Sunday.” No response. Till one Sunday in the fall, the young lady totally totally surprised me, by showing up in church by herself. Great! It just so happened, just so happened

the day she chose to attend? This Gospel lesson was read. And in the church in Indiana, sometimes the member who stood up to read the lessons also read the Gospel, and he did on that day—and I mean he read the Gospel with the Holy Spirit and vinegar, he was really jacked up for Jesus. “If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off! Better to enter heaven crippled than to go to the fire of hell! And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out! Pluck it out, better to be blind in heaven than to have eyesight in hell where the worm never dies and the fire never goes out,” and from where I was sitting I could see this young lady, her jaw slowly dropping to the floor, What have I gotten myself into.

As the kids would say, awkward, well, ok, fact is, we just might have visitors here today as well. It is possible that somewhere in this room there is someone who has never been to church before, or never been to a Lutheran church before—so for your sake let me pause right now to say, We do not take this part of the Bible literally. Ok? We don't do this. You have not stumbled into a cult, you have not accidentally wandered onto the set of Scary Movie V or Saw VI. We do not take these words of Jesus literally! You are however in a place, where we take Jesus Christ seriously. We take this Jesus thing very seriously—or, try to, and I think that's real the point of this reading today, Taking Jesus Christ seriously. Letting Him be both your

Savior and your Lord.

Let Jesus Christ be your Savior, first of all. This is our story and we're sticking with it, that in the mercy of Almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for you. He died on a cross of all things, to forgive you your sins, and on the 3rd day He rose again from the dead to open for you the way of everlasting life. All the things in life you have ever done, and are now ashamed of. All the good things you should have done, but chickened out! All the regrets that have piled up over the years, all the bridges that have been burned, all the times you were not only wrong but also too proud to admit it, listen—He knows. He knows, cause He was there watching! and yet in mercy He chooses to love you and forgive you now. Let Him. You may have been too proud then, no need to be proud today, admit it all and let Jesus Christ be your Savior. Give Him the garbage in your life, and let it be nailed to the cross along with all the garbage from my life. And together, let's both let Jesus be the one, to save us from our sins, and to open for us a new and different kind of life—a God-pleasing sort of life that begins now, and simply never ends.

Take Jesus Christ seriously!—let Him be your Savior. And, along with that of course, maybe the harder part—take Jesus seriously, let Him be your Lord as well. Let Him be, the boss. The Good News is that Jesus the Savior

gives you a new and God-pleasing sort of life. The challenging news is, He actually expects you to start living it? Yes? The old bad habits, the old sins, the old ruts you've found yourself in, they're gone, right?—come now and walk in newness of life, come now, and be God's person. Easier said than done, isn't it.

Look at the Gospel lesson again, the very first verse. The disciple John it seems, was offended. His feelings had been hurt, because somebody out there was working a miracle “but he isn't with us. He's not in our group.” So Jesus looked at John and said Let me get this straight. Miracles are being performed, people are being helped, and my name (the name of Jesus) is being lifted up; and you're offended? You're miffed somehow, is your ego really that touchy? Is your ego, that important? Listen says Jesus, you don't have to cut off your hand, but you do have to cut out the vanity, and the ego. You don't have to give up your eye but you do have to give me your heart—there's the key, keep your eye, give me your heart, *give me control*, Jesus commands. I am your Savior, but I also will be your Lord, there's no other way. And today's the day.

John was vain, he had an over-inflated ego. You may have a different hang up. From alcohol to adultery to anger management issues. The language you use, the attitudes you display. Greed, stinginess with your money when

people are in need. Laziness, stinginess with your time and effort when the world is hurting. Lack of commitment to your Christian calling, when you know perfectly well Jesus Christ is everything or He is nothing at all, whatever it is—cut it out. No, literally, cut it out. Keep your hands, keep your eyes, but if we are to take Jesus seriously then we've got to cut out the sin and give Him our hearts and let Him be Lord, today.

We remained friends with that couple in Indiana, though sadly we never saw either of them ever again in church. I hope I see you again, say this time next week. And I pray, that for all of us, Jesus be Savior and Jesus be Lord, that we keep our eyes and hands. But yield our hearts and our very lives, to the one who died and rose again, even Jesus Christ our Lord. In His name we pray, AMEN.

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