



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092  
(262)241-3121 [www.stjohnsmequon.org](http://www.stjohnsmequon.org)  
Email: [office@stjohnsmequon.org](mailto:office@stjohnsmequon.org)  
**Pastor James Tiefel**  
**(262) 853-9723 (cell#)**  
Email: [pastortiefel@gmail.com](mailto:pastortiefel@gmail.com)

---

## September 19, 2021

in the Season after Pentecost

### Christians Take Care to Identify Enemies and Friends

Christians struggle and battle with the forces of evil in the world, and the Lord calls on us to take up the weapons of the Word and take on the fight. He also urges us to be cautious and careful as we face our enemies, for not every apparent enemy is an actual enemy. Sometimes the real enemy is closer to home, even in ourselves. This is the point Jesus makes in the Gospel for today. We are wise to listen and learn.

### Sermon

Mark 9:38-50

“Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

“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. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where ‘the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.’<sup>49</sup> Everyone will be salted with fire. “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves and be at peace with each other.”

Did you know that on our planet Earth there are 2.382 billion people call themselves Christian and belong to Christian churches? I didn’t know it either, so I looked it up on Google. I also learned that those 2.382 billion people are divided up in 45,000 denominations. Let’s make this more local. In the United States 205 million people call themselves Christians and they worship in 200 denominations. So if all these billions in the world and all these millions in our country confess Jesus Christ, why can’t they get along and join together?

Jesus warned us it would happen. During the week before he died, he said, **Many will come in my name and will deceive you.** Within 30 years after Jesus ascended, St. Peter was warning Christians that false teachers would **secretly introduce destructive heresies.** At about the same time St. Paul warned, **The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.** 20 years later St. John wrote, **I am writing this letter to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.** So if you want to know why all these Christians in the world can’t get along and why they don’t join together, the answer is pretty obvious—it’s false teaching. You and I are sensitive about this. We’ve heard Jesus say again and again: **If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.** Those words are almost the motto of the Wisconsin Synod. If we have a theme song, it’s this: “God’s Word is our great heritage and shall be ours forever.”

So this is the world and the nation we live in. People who call themselves Christians don't all belong to one church or one denomination. They have different traditions and different ways of doing things, but they also hold to different teachings about the Bible and Jesus and the way to heaven. We can't just ignore them or avoid them. We know these people. They're family and relatives and neighbors. We work with them and live with them and in some cases we love them. But we know that their faith and their church are different from ours. How do we handle that? What do we do?

Jesus' disciples were wondering about the same thing in the Gospel for today. They ran into a man who was healing people but wasn't one of them; he wasn't one of the Twelve. They didn't like it all. They told him to stop. Jesus took them in a different direction. He urged them to accept what the man was doing and be more concerned with what they were doing. Jesus is giving us the same advice this morning when we wonder how to react to all the Christian people and all the Christian churches we know. These are the questions Jesus suggests we ask:

### **How Do We Look**

When we look at others  
And when others look at us?

1. Demon possession was a big problem in Jesus' world. Today the medical community usually calls demon possession psychosis, but you won't convince some Christian psychiatrists that demon possession doesn't exist anymore. Whatever, the cure for demon possession is exorcism. Remember the movie? The exorcist takes on the demon, drives him out, and ends the possession. Jesus exorcised demons seven times during his ministry and he gave his disciples the authority to do it. So it happened that the disciples tried but failed. So they were embarrassed and a little touchy about this.

Not so long after this, Jesus' disciple John reported this incident: **Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.** We don't know what prompted this. Were they really defending Jesus or were they actually defending themselves? Whatever, Jesus provided an answer John probably wasn't expecting. **Do not stop him, for no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.** I think you get the point Jesus was making. If someone does a miracle in my name—if he says "In the name of Jesus I heal you"—and if the healing works, you have to assume that God approved of the healing. What do you think—and there was a little humor in Jesus' voice--Is a man who uses my name to heal someone going to turn around and bad mouth me? And here's the point to remember: Just because a person isn't a member of our little group doesn't mean that he's against us. And if he's not against us, then he's for us and we can be glad he is. Jesus expands this idea. **Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.** God cares about everyone who does good with faith in Jesus no matter what group or denomination they're part of.

When we hear Jesus' words in today's Gospel, we can't come away with wrong ideas. Jesus warned his followers again and again about false teachers and false teaching. Just weeks before Jesus had said, **Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.** But there's another side to that. Even those who do not hold to all of Jesus' words hold to some of them. We may see the errors in the Roman Church, but only God knows how many babies are in heaven who were baptized by Catholic priests or how many children learned Bible history from Catholic nuns or how many sick people were treated in Catholic hospitals. We may identify the false teaching of the non-denominational churches, but Evangelicals treat the Scriptures as the Word of God and defend biblical morality. Many churches we could never agree with sent missionaries to Asia and Africa and proclaimed the name of Jesus long before we Lutherans did. How do we look at other Christians and the work they do? Should we tell them to stop because they are not one with us? That's what John proposed. Not Jesus. Jesus' advice to us is: Reject what is false but rejoice in what is good. Jesus would say, Do the one, but don't leave the other undone.

2. Sometimes it seems that we confessional Lutherans are so determined to stand against error that we challenge and condemn everyone else. One wonders what simple Christians think when we do that. **How do they look at us?** Jesus turned the tables on John when he said, **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.** There was this Catholic woman who rented an upstairs apartment to a Lutheran lady. She went upstairs one day

and noticed a copy of Luther's catechism on her renter's kitchen table. The book was opened to Luther's explanation of the Second Article, you remember: "Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil." The renter walked in and the landlady said, "This is the most wonderful explanation of the Christian faith I have ever read." "You can't believe that." the Lutheran lady exclaimed. "That's not what your church teaches!" The Catholic lady was quiet for a moment and then she said, "Well maybe that's not what I believe." Good intentions from a good Lutheran? Certainly. But the Lutheran lady upstairs stumbled and fell down the stairs of faith.

We must be careful about how others see us. The words Jesus spoke to John were harsh. Words about cutting off hands and feet and plucking out eyes. **Better to be maimed, Jesus said, than be thrown into hell where the worms that eat them do not die and the fire is not quenched.** These are pictures, obviously. But Jesus' point is just as obvious. Watch your life carefully so that others are not confused or misled. We boast about our loyalty to the Scriptures but no one ever sees a Bible opened in our homes. We talk about our church but complain that it always asks for money. We say religion is important to us but our foul language and dirty laughter say something else. We'll hug people we care about but never talk to them about Jesus. How do we look when other Christians look at us? How do we look when Jesus looks at us?

In days gone by, salt was the most precious substance people could buy. Salt preserved food like refrigerators do today. Jesus used the picture of salt to describe what Christians do in the world: They bring health and healing and joy and faith to people's lives. **Salt is good, Jesus said, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves and be at peace with each other.** Be the kind of people Jesus redeemed you to be. We are people Jesus renewed and restored to care about others. We are people Jesus convinced to hold to his teachings but to speak the truth in love. We are people Jesus died for so that we might escape death and rescue others from the same fate. We are people who live in the light of his rising again so that we might rise and walk with others into the mansions of eternity. How do we look? Look to Jesus and we'll look mighty fine whether we're looking at others or they're looking at us! Amen.