

Mark 9:38-50 - “A Mighty Work”

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In the verses just before our text from Mark’s gospel we’re told that the disciples were arguing about who among them was the greatest. Jesus at that time let them know that true greatness comes from God. When He embraces us with His love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ and gives us faith in Him, He makes us great by making us eternal children of God.

But as with any child, we need God’s continual, patient, and parental-like love and care in order to grow in our faith and new life in Christ instead of our old life of sin. This is especially evident when it comes to our sinful impatience with others. To help us grow in our faith, and consequently our patience with others, God patiently feeds and strengthens our faith through His Word.

So let’s take a closer look at what Jesus is telling us in our Gospel reading for today. *“John said to [Jesus], ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’”* We’re not told exactly what John meant by saying that this person in question *“was not following us,”* but since Jesus later says that this person had done *“a mighty work”* in His name, let’s suppose he was someone like the man back in chapter 5 of Mark’s gospel, whom Jesus delivered from being possessed by a legion of demons. After Jesus cast the demons out of this man and sent them into some pigs, Jesus told the man (who wanted to *“follow”* Him) to *“go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you”* (Mk 5:19).

Do you think that God could do *“a mighty work”* through someone like that formerly demon possessed Gentile if he were to tell others *“how much the Lord has done for [him]”*? Sure He could, as well as anyone else who told others what Jesus had done. By sharing with others the Good News about Jesus Christ, almighty God works to bring them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, thus breaking the hold which sin, death, and the devil had on them.

No wonder Jesus said, *“Don’t stop him.”* New Christians can be very energetic when it comes to sharing their faith (which a lot of times puts us seasoned believers to shame). So, instead of trying to stop them, what does Jesus encourage us to do? Patiently encourage them through God’s Word, as He patiently encourages us.

“For truly, I say to you [Jesus continues], whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.” The reward of faith and the fruits of faith in Jesus Christ is eternal life with/in Him, which is given to us the moment we believe or are baptized. Sharing the Gospel with others, together with Baptism, while they may appear to the world to be as insignificant as giving someone a cup of water, are in fact the means through which God accomplishes one of His mightiest works, creating children of God.

That's why Jesus continues by saying, "*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.*"

Whether it's a child or an adult, like the person in our text, to do anything to discourage new born believers, or cause them (by our sinful words, actions or attitudes) to turn away from God's Word, is one of the worse types of abuse. It's an attempt to abort a child of God! And yet how often do our careless, sinful words and actions do just that; leading others away from our only Savior, Jesus Christ.

Then Jesus starts talking not only about the seriousness of sins, but also our need for God to deliver us, by talking about cutting off part of our bodies which cause us to sin. Through these words Jesus is certainly not suggesting that we get into self-harming. Instead, one of the points Jesus is making is how foolish it is to try to sort out our problems (especially our sinful attitudes and impatience) by ourselves. If you start cutting off the parts of your body that cause you to sin, where would you stop?! In the end you would have nothing left, including life itself.

And that's another point of these words of Jesus. They emphasize the fact that the only way to get rid of sin is through death. Jesus makes that abundantly clear through His death on the cross in payment for our sins. He was completely "*cut off*" from His Father on the cross to pay for our sins of impatience and all our other foolish thoughts, words and deeds. Fortunately, unlike us, Jesus is not just a man who could die, He's also God who can rise to life again. The Good News is that He did it all for us, to cut our sins and their ultimate consequences out of our lives and give us new and eternal life in paradise with Him. Thanks be to God.

Our texts end with Jesus saying, "*Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another,*" which sounds like start of a children's sermon:

Who knows what salt is used for? Salt is used for many things, like making food taste better and last longer. One of the reasons salt makes food taste better and last longer last longer is because salt kills the germs that make food go bad.

Jesus is like salt. When He died on the cross He killed the worst germs that make us bad and go bad, our sins. Then He rose from the dead to give us faith in this Good News and to preserve/keep us believing in Him.

Now that you know this Good News about Jesus, that He is our Savior from our sins, death and the devil, He wants you to be like salt shakers by telling other people about Jesus' death and resurrection so that He can be like salt in their lives too, killing the germs of sin in their lives, while at the same time giving and preserving new and eternal life in them. That's "*a mighty work*" of God! [Give out salt packets.]

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.