

Sunday Sermon: September 30, 2018

Sermon Text: Mark 9: 38-50

Sermon Theme: Celebrate the Gifts God Gives

³⁸ “Teacher,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”

³⁹ “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

⁴² “And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to sin, 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. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, 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, ⁴⁸ where “ ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’” ⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

We live in a time when everyone is praised for everything. It’s not just the winner who gets a medal, everyone who participates gets a medal. It’s not just the employee of the month who gets noticed and awarded, the whole team gets rewarded for their collective work, even if there are some of the team who don’t do a whole lot. We don’t get good grades for working hard anymore, you get points for just showing up. We don’t just congratulate high school and college graduates, we also have a ceremony for kindergarteners, middle schoolers and every other grade who moves up a grade.

Whether this is a good thing or not is something that is debated by many people. Some say that a society like this cannot possibly continue because we will never learn how to deal with struggle, negativity and disappointment. They say that these little experiences, we don’t win, we don’t get a great grade, we don’t get a celebration for everything, helps us to figure out how to deal with many different things in our life and to put them in the proper perspective.

Others say that praising people is good. They say we have a lot of negativity in the world and all people, especially children, need to be built up more than ever. They say that that we need to build a good self-image in this way and then people will be able to properly deal with their feelings and emotions over the long term.

Again, this is for the experts to debate, but I bet we all have our own ideas about what should be praised in another person and what shouldn’t be. We know what special, something that we praise people for, and what we think is just a normal part of everyday life that doesn’t need anything praise.

In the word of God this morning Jesus points out something that we might miss celebrating, but it is something that is definitely worth celebrating: the gifts and talents that he gives. God has blessed every person with earthly and spiritual gifts, we should never stop celebrating the earthly talents he gives each person and the spiritual blessings that flow from Jesus.

Preschool teachers hear the question, “Is this how I do it?” about 1000 times day. It can come from students who don’t really know what they are doing, “Is this how I do it?” It can come from students who need reassurance, “Is this how your do it?” It can also come from students who know they did it right, but want the confirmation and recognition from the teacher that they are doing a good job. “Is this how I do it?”

John’s question to Jesus is one of those questions that a student asks a teacher. If you put a question mark or two in there, maybe we hear it a little better. **Teacher, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us?”**

There is probably a little of all of those questions in what John is asking here. This is something he is looking for an answer to. He wants reassurance that they has done right. Maybe even a little recognition if they have done a good job.

Yet, in answering his question Jesus doesn't bring any reassurance or recognition, instead he teaches the disciples and us a lesson about celebrating the gifts God gives. ³⁹ **“Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.**

The disciples apparently didn't know this man. He wasn't one of the twelve or one of the normal crowd that followed Jesus. All they knew was that this man was casting out demons in Jesus' name. They were skeptical about his power and wanted him to stop.

The circumstances were much the same when Joshua asked Moses to stop Eldad and Medad from prophesying in the camp. These two men did not come when the rest of the elders were called to the tent of meeting for this special occasion. These two men were not part of the group who were there prophesying. Maybe there was reason for skepticism about how they were doing this. Maybe there was reason to ask them to stop.

Moses' answer to Joshua is fairly close to Jesus' answer to his disciples. Moses said, **“Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”** Both answers show that God's gifts are special and reason for special thanks and celebration to the Lord.

There are many gifts and talents out there aren't there. Maybe someone has the gift to teach better than we do, maybe they are more knowledgeable or wise than we are, maybe they have more energy, maybe they know a lot about God's Word. All of these are gifts that God gives to each person in his own measure. When God has given someone else a gift that they use and we see, we should celebrate our God for his goodness to that person and to every one of us.

There are times that we are also not thankful for someone else's gifts. Instead of celebrating them, we can become jealous of them like the disciples or Joshua did. When these gifts belong to someone else, we find reason to tell them to stop, or we grumble against them and turn them off in our minds.

To the one gifted to teach we decide we don't like it when we are lectured to, for the knowledgeable or wise one, we don't like a know-it-all, for someone who has a lot of energy, we are skeptical because they seem to be a part of everything and we aren't, and for the one who knows God's Word, we don't want to listen to them either.

We sin against God when we are jealous and covet the gifts that he gives to others. We sin when we are not content with what he has given to us. We further sin against God when we do not thank him for the blessings that he gives to us by using them to his glory.

How many times do we silence our own gifts that God gives to us? How many times do we look at our gifts as not as good as someone else's or not worth using? How many times do we just pass over opportunities to use our gifts because we don't want to use what God gives to us.

Jesus' answer to the disciples shows that whenever we use our gifts we are giving thanks to God. From the greatest to the least, all of our gifts are needed in the service of Jesus. **Anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because of you are a Christian, they will not lose their reward.**

We have 1000's of ways to serve the Lord. Even our humble service is pleasing to the Lord. Our humble efforts at ushering, setting up and serving our fellowship treats, helping our service guilds with altar work, doing yard work, teaching Sunday School, raising our children, serving on the council, going canvassing, doing person outreach. There is no different between them, all of these things are ways to thank the Lord.... and they are all reason to celebrate the gifts that God gives to us as we serve others and as we see others serving us.

We have reason to celebrate the earthly gifts God gives to us because they are many, but we also have reason to celebrate the greatest gift that God gives that gives us reason to use all of our other gifts.

Imagine if Jesus had only used his gifts for himself. Imagine if he only preached and taught to 12 hand-picked friends. How would the Gospel of Jesus gotten to others? What if Jesus had only done miracles that helped himself or his family? How would many have seen the power and grace of God on display? What if Jesus had suffered and died to save only the people that he wanted to save? What would have happened to all the other sinful people who desperately need the salvation that Jesus' brings?

Jesus used his gifts on earth to make sure that the whole world would know that he is the Savior. He served all people, the rich and poor, those who belonged and those who don't belong, those who thought themselves saints and those who knew they were sinners. He taught us that righteousness was not in our own works. We are not able to use our gifts in order to save ourselves. He taught us that it was only through his perfect work that we have the hope of eternal life.

Jesus perfect work included his perfect life, his suffering and death and his resurrection --- all for us. All that he won for us on the cross gives us reason to thank and praise him for this great gift of forgiveness and eternal life that he has given to us.

The greatest gift that Jesus gives is the gift of heaven. At the end of our lesson, Jesus teaches us that his gift is one that we should guard with our very lives.

⁴³ If your hand causes you to sin, 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. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, 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,

These words are often hard for us to hear because there are many times that we do not celebrate Jesus' gifts by living a life that guards against sin. We know that our feet, hands and eyes cause us to sin every day. Jesus is not telling us to literally cutting off body parts that we have used to sin. Instead, he is telling us to guard this special gift of eternal life as if our very life depended on it.

This gift of heaven is one that we should value above many things. We should value heaven and be willing to make sacrifices, we should turn from our sins, we should avoid temptations that may lead us away from it.

We won't do that because it's easier to see with two eyes or walk with two feet, but because Jesus has forgiven us all of our sins. He has forgiven the sins of jealousy, anger and coveting over someone else's gifts. He has forgiven the sins of laziness when we do not want to use our gifts or are slow to use them to thank him. In place of punishment, he has poured out on us, immeasurable gifts and talents that we should celebrate. He has also used his own life and death to bring us forgiveness and eternal life. These are gifts from God that are worth celebrating.