

Benefice of St Benedict Sunday Reflection – 26th September 2021

Mark 9:38-end

John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you 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 to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

'For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'

Reflection

How often are the stories that we read in the Bible and hear each week in church can be said to be our stories. So many are truly about us and tell us so much about our identity as human beings. Today's story certainly falls into that category because it tells us something about who we are as people. John is in a panic - he and the other disciples have run into a stumbling block – an outsider – "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to stop him – because he's not one of us." I'm sure I don't know exactly what that meant for John and the others but in today's terms that it often means the other does not look or dress like us, the other does not speak or act like us, the other does not think or believe like us, the other does not do it our way. He or she is not following us. Whatever it was for John and the disciples, they felt threatened by this 'someone'. He was casting out demons, alleviating oppression, offering a new life, all in the name of Jesus. Chances are this 'someone' was getting a name, status, and recognition

Today's gospel is a continuation and part of last week's story

Last week the disciples argued among themselves about who is the greatest This week they are complaining about this 'someone' - this stumbling block to their status, power, and recognition.

I wonder if this might not be a variation on last week's argument.

John wants to make the conversation about this someone - this stumbling block.

Perhaps he is referring to himself and the disciples as being part of an "inner circle," the "club" or the "clique," and now feels put out because someone outside that circle is also able to use God's gifts, and that person is using them without the "proper" credentials and because they can't control him – he must be stopped

Do we sometimes make circles by dividing people into us and them or do we react as Jesus showed us by enlarging the circle?

*"Look, leave him alone, we need all the help we can get. We might interpret it as: I don't care if he is a part of our little group or **not**. Look at what he is doing, not at the colour of his skin, the language he is speaking, his sexual preference or his politics. Is he doing good? Is he living a kind, helpful life of love? That's all I want. We need more people like that. Whoever is not against me is for me."*

In a manner of speaking, Jesus tells the disciples and each one of us to look at the stumbling blocks we place in front of ourselves and others. How we sometimes behave in ways that are unreasonable or unacceptable - excluding people who live, believe, worship, serve, and practice their faith differently than we do.

What makes Jesus' response so helpful is that even today the Church needs more outsiders

How many of us are guilty in saying "this is the way things have always been done"? We put the future of our church in jeopardy if we continue in this way

Too often we are the stumbling block of which Jesus speaks. Far too often, we tend to think that whoever is not for us is against us. It is so much easier that way. Do we tend to think sometimes “I am not like one of them?”

I am not one of those conservatives or I am not one of those liberals.

I am not one of those Baptists or one of those Catholics or one of those fundamentalists. We don't do things that way. I am not one of those whom I believe is not saved. By behaving in this way, we draw circles around ourselves and others so we can better distinguish ourselves versus all others and thereby justify who we are and who we are not.

*However, we need to remember that wherever we draw that circle, Jesus is going to be standing outside the circle with a great number of people who we might well think are not for Jesus at all. So, we need to go beyond our circles, move away from the categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’ because those are the stumbling blocks that Jesus spoke about. The starting point is that place where we begin entering into relationship with others. Entering into relationship with all types of people we would consider “other” was a **constant** starting point for Jesus. When the disciples came complaining about “someone” casting out evil spirits in Jesus’ name, Jesus said, “Don’t stop them! Whoever is not against us is for us.”*

The starting point for us as Christians is never about who we are not. It is all about who we are, there is no need to justify who we are because we belong and are held in God’s love and, in that love, there is no distinction, no “us” and no “them.”