



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

October 3, 2021

Pastor Randy Ott

19th Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Numbers 11:16, 24-29](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 51b

Second Lesson: [Philippians 1:12-18a](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Mark 9:38-50](#)

Grace Leads Us to Recognize When We Are the Problem

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

This last Thursday night in the New Life in Christ class we went through Lesson 20, which is going through Christian Outreach Ministry, looking at one way that we can share our faith with others. We went through God's Great Exchange (most of the kids that had been in Confirmation class learned how to do God's Great Exchange.) It's a simple way of sharing the Law and the Gospel to show us what we are and to show us what God is. It goes through what God demands of us and what God sees when He looks at us and how we aren't holy as He demands that we be holy.

The next section that we learned was Man-made Remedies. One of the man-made remedies (it's something I think we all practice at one time or another) is trying to feel better about ourselves by comparing ourselves to someone else. *I know I'm not perfect and God wants me to be perfect, but at least I'm not...* I don't care who you are, you can always find someone that you think is worse than you are. *I'm on death row for murder but at least I didn't murder 28 people like the guy down the cell block. Or, At least I didn't dismember them.* You can justify all kinds of things. We do it all the time.

Sometimes we look around at other people and we say, "Okay, I know I'm a sinner, but I didn't do THAT and that sin is WAY worse than mine." God's pretty clear. If you have sinned and broken the Law in one point, you have broken all of it. Don't compare yourself to other people. Compare yourself to God. He said, ***"Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy."*** ([Leviticus 19:2](#).) You and I are not holy and we never will be holy by our own actions. But we have been declared holy through the life and death

of Christ and through the gift the Holy Spirit has put in our hearts. So this comparison stuff kind of misses the point. Yet we still do it all the time.

I think this morning what we see is that the apostles did it. John's question of this guy was really a statement. **"Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."** It sounds like pride was getting in the way of the apostles. It's not that far of an assumption because a little bit earlier in Mark they had just been on the Mount of Transfiguration, three of them, and had seen Jesus in His full, divine glory so they probably thought they were a little more special than other people. Then they had seen Jesus heal a young boy. Then as they were on their way talking about all of it they started arguing about which of them would be the greatest in God's kingdom, and they got busted by Jesus for it. It wasn't all that long before that they hadn't been able to cast out a demon and now someone else could perform miracles in Jesus' name and they didn't even get to see the stuff that these guys had seen, so they thought they were more important, more special than this guy. Jesus deals with John's question really bluntly. **"Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name..."** I would assume it's because there is faith in that person's heart and God is working through that person. Jesus said, "You can't perform that miracle and then in the next minute say something bad about me. Why are you zealous for you guys? You should be zealous about the kingdom of God" seems to be the implied answer of Jesus. But we can get all this messed up.

So Jesus takes this chance to teach them about how important it is to stay connected and focused on Him. He starts saying, **"If anyone causes one of these little ones..."** Shortly before this there were some children there with Him, so He could be referring to the "little ones" as the children. **"If anyone causes one of these little ones"** to sin... Or He could be talking about "little ones" in the sense of being new to the faith. Perhaps this man that was performing miracles was new to the faith and by their rebuke and admonishment, maybe now they were leading him to think he had done something sinful when he really hadn't and it could be causing him to sin. He says **"...it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea."** Well, a large millstone is not a brand of flotation device. It is a huge stone that was pulled by a donkey. If you put that on and jump in the water, you're going to sink. So He was really saying, "Don't be so wrapped up in yourself that you lead someone else into sin and lead them away from me and put a roadblock between me and them. You're better off not living."

Then He goes on to talk about the body. He talks about hands. He talks about feet. He talks about eyes. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your foot does, cut it off. If your eye does, pluck it out. Jesus here is not teaching us about the resurrection body. That's not His point. His point is to say we need to recognize the things that are causing US to sin. Watch out for them so they don't become a stumbling block in our walk with Jesus. He's telling us that it's vital! Go the lengths that at times are painful for you when

you see that you're the problem. Cut yourself off so you're not going to be the problem for yourself or for others in their relationship with Jesus Christ. His illustration kind of makes sense in a human setting. There are times I've ministered to people who had to have a part of their body removed for health reasons so that it would benefit the rest of their body.

I don't remember how many years ago it was because I don't remember time and dates and stuff like that, but when I spent the week in the hospital from Christmas Day to New Year's Day, I remember I was kind of down about it because my kids had to be there the whole time. And because they thought I might be infectious with something, they had to wear these hazmat suits when they came to visit. What a wonderful way to spend your Christmas vacation when you're in college—putting on a hazmat suit so you could go see your dad, who is delirious with a fever in a bed. That sounds like a great time. So I was kind of down about them having to do that. One night the nurse came in and saw I was down and she said, "Are you worried you're going to lose your leg?" I wasn't worried about that. I was worried about ruining the kids' vacation. My thinking at that time was if I lose my leg, the doctor has been after me to lose some weight so I guess that's one way to do it. But I wasn't worried about that because I figured if the doctors thought that had to happen, that's what had to happen. That's just the way it would be. I was more worried about my kids. I kept asking my kids what time it was all the time and every time I'd go to bed, I'd say "What time is it?" because I wanted them to go home and have fun and not just sit in a hospital. So right next to my bed at home now I have a clock that's about this big. It's got big, huge numbers so I always know what time it is. That was how my loving children responded to dad's concern for them.

So I can see what Jesus is saying. Physically we do that at times but spiritually, how good are we at it. When we see we are the problem and we see we are making choices that are causing a problem for our relationship with Christ or someone else's relationship with Christ, are we willing to go to great lengths to cut ourselves off from that problem, remove ourselves from those situations? I don't know that we always are. Jesus is laying in front of us today that sometimes we need to do that. He says, **"Everyone will be salted with fire."** He's not talking about hell here. **"Everyone will be salted with fire."** He's not talking about salt as a seasoning like we use it all the time. He's talking about it as a preservative. The only thing that preserves us so that we don't go into hell, where the worm does not stop eating and the fire is not put out, is the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Believing that Jesus lived and died for our sins is the salt that preserves us no matter how much difficulty we've been going through. No matter how many times we have failed our God, that salt (the Gospel message of Jesus) is what preserves us. But now He says, **"Everyone will be salted with fire."** I think that means that sometimes it's hard to understand how God refines our faith. It's hard how we ourselves have to prune our lives and sometimes we have to make those difficult choices.

If there is someone in our life that is leading us into sin, then maybe they're not the best choice to have in our life and we might have to end that friendship. If there is something in our life that we love and we say "This makes me happy and God wants me to be happy," but God in His Word has clearly said "This is sin. This is wrong. Don't do that," then we have to be salted with fire and because of our faith in Christ, we repent and we turn away from that sin and cut it out of our lives. Sometimes we just have to see we are the problem. It's not someone else that forced us to sin. It's us who chose to sin.

When we see our sins, get past the comparison that someone else's sin is worse, get past the blame game (it's not my fault; it's their fault). Salt yourself with fire and be honest and say "God, have mercy on me, a poor, miserable sinner" and mean it! Don't just say the words out of habit. Understand what you're saying about yourself. This is what each and every one of us is—a sinner!

Have salt in yourself. Keep the Gospel at the center of your life is what God is saying. When you see you are the problem, go to that salt, go to that message that God loves you and forgave you in Christ. Then notice how He says to apply it. ***"...be at peace with each other."*** At times we are really good at saying each other is at fault when really we are the fault. We are good at blaming someone else for the sin's we've committed. He's telling us to be at peace with each other. Notice and see your brothers and sisters in Christ for what they are. They are sinners who will sin. And you are a sinner who will sin. See them for what they are. They are people who, if they are believers, have salt in themselves. They have this knowledge that Jesus lived and died for their sins. See them for what they are. They are people that God loved just as much as He loved you, that He died for just as He died for you, that He gave the gift of faith to just as He gave it to you, and see that the only answer to all of these things to have peace with ourselves is to focus on Christ and take the attention off of ourselves.

Even when we've seen our sins, take the attention off yourself. Quit beating yourself up for it and know that in Christ, you are forgiven and begin to live in that thankfulness and live as God has called you to live. See your brothers and sisters as brothers and sisters in Christ. See them for what they are; people that Christ lived and died for to take away their sins, the same as you, and be at peace with them knowing that God is at peace with you because He gave you the salt, the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world and your personal Savior. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.