

Sunday closest to September 28**Proper 21****Year B****RCL****The Collect**

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament**Numbers 11:4-6,10-16,24-29**

The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.” Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrances of their tents. Then the Lord became very angry, and Moses was displeased.

So Moses said to the Lord, “Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child,’ to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they come weeping to me and say, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favor in your sight—and do not let me see my misery.”

So the Lord said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them take their place there with you.” So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again. Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but

they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, “My lord Moses, stop them!” But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!”

The Psalm

Psalm 19:7-14

7 The law of the Lord is perfect
and revives the soul; *

**the testimony of the Lord is sure
and gives wisdom to the innocent.**

8 The statutes of the Lord are just
and rejoice the heart; *

**the commandment of the Lord is clear
and gives light to the eyes.**

9 The fear of the Lord is clean
and endures for ever; *

**the judgments of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether.**

10 More to be desired are they than gold,
more than much fine gold, *

**sweeter far than honey,
than honey in the comb.**

11 By them also is your servant enlightened, *
and in keeping them there is great reward.

12 Who can tell how often he offends? *
cleanse me from my secret faults.

13 Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins;
let them not get dominion over me; *

**then shall I be whole and sound,
and innocent of a great offense.**

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my
heart be acceptable in your sight, *

O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

The Epistle**James 5:13-20**

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest. My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

The Gospel**Mark 9:38-50**

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.” But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward 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.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Sermon on Mark 9:38-50: "The Radical Call to Discipleship"

Today's gospel is a continuation and part of last week's story. It's one story told on two Sundays. Jesus and the disciples are still in the same house as last week, the child is still on Jesus' lap, and Jesus is still challenging us on what it means to follow Him. It's a call to radical discipleship that demands self-reflection, humility, and a commitment to holiness. In these verses, Jesus is teaching His disciples, and us, three things, the importance of unity, the seriousness of sin, and the need for personal sacrifice in our journey with Him.

As the passage begins, John brings a concern to Jesus. *"Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."* John doesn't say that this person was interfering with their work, or that he had a different purpose, or that he opposed them. John simply tells Jesus, *"He was not following us."* He was not one of them. Today it often means that the person does not look or dress like us, or doesn't speak or act like us, or maybe they don't believe as we do.

Whatever it was for John and the disciples, they felt threatened, and they were guarding what they perceived as their exclusive role. Jesus's response is both surprising and corrective. He says, "*Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us.*"

It's as though Jesus is saying don't worry about the other guy, worry about yourself. Jesus is expanding the disciples' understanding of His mission and the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom isn't limited to one group, but it's meant to spread, to encompass all who call on His name.

Jesus' words speak directly to the danger of exclusivity and narrow-mindedness. The disciples wanted to shut down someone who was casting out demons in Jesus' name simply because he wasn't "*following us.*" But Jesus' vision for His Kingdom is far larger than human boundaries. The Kingdom of God is inclusive of anyone who genuinely follows Him, regardless of which group they belong to.

We, too, often fall into the trap of thinking that others who don't share our specific traditions, practices, or theological perspectives are somehow "lesser" Christians. But Jesus reminds us that we should look for the fruit of people's lives rather than focusing on their affiliation. If they are working for His Kingdom, we should support and celebrate them.

This teaches us humility. The mission of Christ isn't just about us and our little church in Palolo Valley. It's about the global body of Christ working together to bring glory to God. Unity in the body of Christ is essential, and we must avoid a mindset of division over non-essentials.

Next, Jesus turns to the sobering topic of sin. He says, *"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."*

Jesus takes sin seriously, especially when it affects others, particularly those who are vulnerable.

He goes on to speak about personal sin, using stark, hyperbolic language to make His point: "*If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off... If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off... And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out*". Jesus isn't advocating for literal self-mutilation, but He is stressing the severity of sin. It is so dangerous and destructive that we must take drastic measures to remove it from our lives.

Sin isn't something we can treat casually. It distorts our relationship with God and others. Jesus uses this intense language to show us that discipleship demands purity, a holiness that comes from being ruthless with anything in our lives that leads us away from God. This is a call to self-discipline and vigilance in our spiritual lives.

Finally, Jesus talks about the necessity of salt: "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."

Salt in the ancient world was used for preservation and purification. In the same way, our lives as disciples of Christ should be marked by purity and perseverance in faith. Jesus says that we will all be "salted with fire," indicating that trials and suffering will come, but these difficulties can purify us, drawing us closer to God if we respond with faith and humility.

As disciples, we are called to be "salt" in the world—to preserve goodness, to bring flavor to the lives of those around us by living out the Gospel. But if we lose our saltiness, if we compromise with sin or stop living out our faith, we lose our purpose.

Mark's profound passage challenges us in multiple ways. It calls us to unity, reminding us that God's Kingdom is bigger than our personal groups or preferences. It demands that we take sin seriously, doing whatever is necessary to cut it out of our lives. And it calls us to be salt in the world, living lives of purity and peace.

E pule kākou, let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the radical call to discipleship that You have given us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to seek unity within the body of Christ, to love and support all those who work in Your name. Give us the courage to confront sin in our lives, cutting off anything that separates us from You. And may we be salt in the world, living in purity and peace, preserving Your truth, and shining Your light.

In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.