

Mark 9:38-41 – Pentecost 19B – September 30, 2018
Growth Group Series: Who Do You Say I Am?
Week #3 - The One Who Gives Us Purpose
New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church – Shoreview, MN
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Mark 9:38-41 "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.

Dear Christian friends,

We continue our Growth Group Series: Who Do You Say I Am? For those new to Growth Groups...

Two weeks ago, we saw that the answer to "Who Do You Say I Am?" was "The Messiah" as Peter responded to the question with the words, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Last week, we saw how Jesus connected his "great" example of being the ultimate Servant of All, to encourage us towards true "greatness" in our lives of selfless and loving service to him and one another. Where we left off, Jesus and the disciples had been on their way to Capernaum – the bustling village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and the home base for Jesus' Galilean ministry. He has just explained to them that true greatness in the Kingdom of God is to be found in humble service.

Which got John to thinking about an event that happened on their way to join Jesus in Capernaum. **"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."** And while it is difficult to say whether John is seeking forgiveness from Jesus, feedback from Jesus, or approval from Jesus, Jesus responds as ♦

The One Who Gives Us Purpose. And as we meditate on Jesus' words this morning and throughout the week in our Growth Group discussions, please, join me in prayer.

It is bad enough when it happens on a national level (I'm talking about the political division in which our country seems to be gripped), but when division happens in the church, that's when it hurts the most. And the reason is simple: When we are divided, we can't be united in our God-given purpose. ♦

Consider... The apostle John said to Jesus, **Teacher...we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us**

Consider... In our first reading today, Moses gathered together 70 elders at the Lord's command and told them to meet at the Tent of Meeting. 68 show up while 2 stayed behind at camp. The Lord took from the Spirit on Moses and places it on all 70 elders who immediately begin prophesying. But a young man runs up to Moses and informs him that the two elders who had stayed back at camp are also prophesying. **Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!"**

Consider... A small rural church had a major dispute about where the pies should be placed in the kitchen prior to serving them for the annual turkey dinner. One woman actually left the church because several new-comers to the church had convinced the rest of those working in the kitchen that it would be more efficient to put the pies on the counter beside the sink instead of the counter next to the refrigerator. *It's not the right way to do it, she said. We've never done it that way before, and I am not going to be part of doing it that way now. I won't have any part of that kind of thing. Those new people are going to ruin this church.*

Do you see a connection between the three events? Just last week we saw the disciples arguing about who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. They were all wrapped up in who could do the greatest things and who would get the greatest rewards. And while we only hinted at it last week, the disciples were letting their quest for greatness effect the way that they got along with one another and the way they treated other Christians. ***“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.”***

Understand, this man wasn't doing anything wrong. He wasn't misusing Jesus' name. The disciples told him to stop, simply because the man ***was not one of [them]***. In light of their previous argument you can't help but assume that they really stopped him because they wanted the glory for themselves - and they didn't like to see anyone else with the same powers they had been given.

It's much like the story of young Joshua. When he heard that other people were prophesying besides Moses, he was panicked about it and said, ***“Moses, my lord, stop them!”*** (Numbers 11:26) Even though there was nothing wrong with what they were doing, he wanted them to stop - because he wanted Moses to have all of the prophesying power.

And as Christians today, as we bear the cross and follow after our Lord, we can expect to endure hostility and persecution from outside of the church. Absolutely! But sadly, some of the most painful experiences of Christians come not from outsiders but from fellow believers. ♦

How easy it is for us to impose crosses on one another, when our own jealousies and pride give birth to strife and loveless faultfinding. Who gets elected as elder, who sings the solos in worship, who leads the meetings, who sets the schedules,

who makes the decisions are all opportunities for division. And meanwhile the devil just keeps doing his evil work, laughing away at how easy it is to get us to turn on one another, instead of selflessly forgiving one another, serving one, standing with one another in love.

Just look at how Moses responded to Joshua: ***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.***

Jesus echoed a similar response. ***“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, for whoever is not against us is for us.”*** Essentially, Jesus is saying, as long as his name is being glorified, as long as the Kingdom of God is being served, more than one person, more than one way, can be used to accomplish his purposes. ♦ And while it's relatively easy to agree with that point in theory, it is much more difficult to put it into practice.

But if we continue to hold on to our jealousy, if we continue to hold on to our pride, if we continue to think that only my way is the right way, we'll find ourselves going the wrong way, on a highway to the place where Jesus describes only a few verses after our text for today, the place where ***“their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”*** (9:48)

The difference, Jesus says, between hell and heaven, between damnation and salvation, between division and unity is as simple as a name. ♦ Just look at what Jesus says to the disciples. ***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.***

Because of who Jesus is, because of who the Bible declares him to be, because of what he has done for you and for me, his name makes all the difference. Not your

name. Not my name. The name of *Jesus*. For God, in his undeserved love, accepts the payment which Jesus made for our sinfulness. The Father has accepted Jesus' payment for sin—his suffering and torture and death on Calvary's cross—and he's accepted it as if we had made it. In the eyes of God our jealousy...is gone. Our selfishness...gone. Our divisiveness...gone. Our deserved eternal death in hell...gone... all because of Jesus. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, ***you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*** (1 Corinthians 6:11) Jesus has made all the difference.

And in that name, we all, together, find our purpose – thanking, honoring, worshiping, and proclaiming the name of Jesus. That means getting rid of jealousy and pride and uniting our efforts, our talents, our gifts for service to the glory of God. We are to stop being jealous ***of each other*** and start ***Being Jealous for God*** and rejoicing in the work of his Kingdom, whether it's you or me or someone else.

Just look at Paul, rejoicing that God can use even the work of the selfish and the envious to further his Kingdom. ***Some [he wrote,] preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, and others out of good will. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am placed here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking they can cause trouble for me while I am in chains.*** ¹⁸***What does it matter?*** No, don't get distracted by all of the inanities of life. Don't get caught up in the trap of jealousies and divisions. For your Savior is the One Who Gives You Purpose that we can, ***◆*** united, rejoice at the ***advance [of] the gospel*** and ***become much more confident about daring to speak the word of God fearlessly.*** God grant it. Amen.