

Who is With Us?

- Mark 9:38-41
- Last week we saw Jesus answer the question the disciples were asking each other, “Who is the greatest?” His answer was, the one who serves others, including serving the least, the last, and the lowest. Greatness is not measured by how many serve you, but rather how many you serve. And that statement alone can make it sound like a contest to see who can get the most people to serve, like the contest to see who can get the most likes on social media. But it is not the number Jesus is interested in, it is the attitude of the heart. The woman who spends the better part of her married life serving a disabled husband, or vice versa, who makes herself last of all because of her love for Christ and her husband, is great in the economy of God.
- Today the question the disciples need answering is, “Who is with us?” And this text is another example of a lesson that Jesus taught his disciples that was more fully explained by Mark than it was by Matthew and Luke. It is a question of who should be included in our group. Who is part of us, and who is on the outside? I know I have told you this before, but one of my favorite songs in my misguided youth was “Signs” by the Five Man Electrical Band. It appealed to my rebellious nature and my hairstyle at the time with lyrics like this: “And the sign said, ‘Long-haired freaky people need not apply,’ So I tucked my hair up under my hat, and I went in to ask him why. He said, ‘You look like a fine upstandin’ young man, I think you’ll do.’ So I took off my hat and said, ‘Imagine that, huh, me workin’ for you’”
- Music teaches, doesn’t it? It was a Scottish writer and politician in the 18th century who said, “Let me make the **songs of a nation**, and I care not who makes its laws.” -Andrew Fletcher
- The disciples were wanting to put up a sign in the whole area that said, “Warning! YOU are not allowed to cast out demons in the name of Jesus Christ if you are not part of *this* group.” Never mind that they couldn’t do it last time they tried, right? I remember a friend of mine, in the 80’s who was fired up for Jesus and wanted to tell everyone he knew. He lived in Greensboro at the time and was going door to door witnessing in a neighborhood there. Then one day he got a call from someone who belonged to a church in that area. He said, “Hey, I appreciate your zeal for the Gospel and all, but this area is part of So-n-So Church, and the pastor wanted me to call you and ask you to go share your faith somewhere else.” The pastor wanted to put up a sign that said, “Warning! If you are not a member of So-n-So Church, you are not allowed to tell people about Jesus in this neighborhood.” That is a blatant misuse of “Neighborhood Watch!”
- Let’s look at this text today under three main points: It’s Common, It’s Wrong, and It’s Jesus.
- **It’s Common (verse 38)**
- We tend to think of John as gentle and loving. But remember, he is the other part of the duo whom Jesus nicknamed “Boanerges,” which means, “Sons of Thunder.” He and his brother James are the ones who suggested to Jesus that they could gladly firebomb a Samaritan village for him since the people there had not shown hospitality. “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:54)

And here John has told someone to stop casting out demons in Jesus name. "Hey, you. Stop that. I see what you did there, setting that man free from a demon. You are not with US, so you cannot do that." The emphasis there is common: if you are not with US, then you must not be right. Interesting that John said "us." "Jesus, we tried to stop him because he was not following us." James Edwards writes, "In complete disregard to the lesson of the previous story, John regards his call as a disciple not as a call to service but as an entitlement of privilege and exclusion."

- We saw this in the days of Moses. Remember the names Eldad and Medad? And why haven't any of you named your sons after those guys? **Look at Numbers 11:24-29.**
- Joshua wanted to put up a sign that said, "Warning! If you are not prophesying in the Tent of Meeting, you are doing it wrong. Stop it." There was concern in the Old Testament and in the New about who is a false prophet and who is a true prophet. But Joshua based his disapproval of these two men simply on the place where they prophesied and not on the words they said or their heart for God.
- We see this in Acts 15, when the question of the century had to be answered correctly, or the church would have not made it to the second century. The question was, "Which Gentiles can become Christians?" You remember, there were some who said a Gentile man could not be saved unless he was first circumcised. In other words, they wanted to mandate that a Gentile had to become a Jew first and *then* become a Christian! And there were believers there who said that: "But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.'" These were believers, but they were wrong on this issue. Peter, speaking of the Gentiles who had come to faith, said, "And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith." It is common, this desire to draw a circle around your group, the people who think and believe exactly as you do and say, "We are the ones!" And it is especially dangerous to do that when what the "other group" disagrees with you about is a nonessential.
- That leads us to the second point:
 - **It's Wrong (verse 39-40)**
 - Jesus tells John and the rest of the disciples to stop. He was gracious, here. He could have said to his disciples, "Why are you telling someone *not* to do what you were not *able* to do! He instead just tells them to stop being suspicious of his other disciples. It is wrong to assume that someone who is doing a mighty work in Jesus' name is evil. He cannot do what he did unless he is empowered by God, and that one is mine. And therefore, is one of us. Paul said it like this: "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:3)
 - The disciples would be wise, we would be wise, therefore, if we are very cautious about thinking ill toward any who bear good fruit in the Lord! It is wrong to assume that those who do not see everything exactly as we do are being deceived or are out of line.
 - Jesus adds this: "For the one who is not against us is for us." Jesus includes the 12 in that number, and we know that Judas will turn against him. But this statement shows the Lord to be more open, more inclusive, than his own disciples! Making his name known

is more important than our differences on things that are nonessentials. We know Paul knew that, as he said that there were some preachers who preached “from envy and rivalry,...not sincerely but thinking to inflict me in my imprisonment.” Paul could have said, “When you see those guys, tell them to stop preaching!” Instead he said, “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.” (Philippians 1:15-18)

- In Matthew, Jesus says this as well: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” See the difference? “Whoever is not with me,” Jesus says. John said of the man casting out demons, “he was not following us.” The disciples were holding at arms length those who believed in Jesus but were not with *them*. Jesus says, don’t do that. They are part of us because they are doing that in my name, with God’s power. But here in Matthew, Jesus makes it clear that no one can be neutral about Jesus. You are either for him or you are against him. You are either gathering with him or scattering. Charles Cranfield writes, “While the principle of Mark 9:40 should govern the attitude of the church toward those without, the principle of Matthew 12:30 must be part of the church’s preaching both to those without and to those within.” Because the central point, the essential truth is...Jesus.
- **It’s Jesus (verse 41)**
- Jesus refers to himself as the Christ, reminding them of what Peter had said in Caesarea Philippi when Jesus said to the disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter replied, “You are the Christ.” And he reminds the disciples that they belong to him. “Whoever gives you a cup of cold water because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.” We belong to him, saints. We are Christ’s. We know him. He knows us. We follow him because he alone has the words of eternal life. We are one with him, and our fellowship is in him. Our fellowship is in Christ, and that fellowship cannot be broken. Not by disagreements over how we should do communion. Or what style of music we should sing when we worship. Or whether we raise our hands or just our voices. Or whether we agree about the economy. Or about politics.
- Jesus reminds us here that the simplest act of kindness, even giving a cup of water to someone who belongs to Jesus, will not be hidden from God and will not go unrewarded by him. We don’t have to cast out demons. We do have to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, and whatever we do to the least of these, Jesus said, “you did it to me.”
- Prayer