

Be At Peace With One Another - Rev. Denise Stone

Text: Mark 9:38-50

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 9-26-2021

³⁸ 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.” ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ 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.

⁴² “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. ⁴³ 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. ⁴⁵ 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. ⁴⁷ 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, ⁴⁸ where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

⁴⁹ “For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ 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.”ⁱ

The Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

What translations of the Bible do you have at home? (RESPONSES)

At our house we have all of those plus a Greek New Testament.

To really understand the text for today, we need to recap the passages from the last two Sundays, as all of this is really one continuous chain of events.

So, I want you to consider much of today's Sermon as the *Denise Revised Version*.

We pick up with Jesus and the disciples as they are traveling through the villages of Caesarea Philippi.

On the way, Jesus asks his group, who do the people you run into tell you that they think I am?

"Some say you are John the Baptist or the Prophet Elijah," "others say you are one of the other prophets."

"But who do YOU think I am?"

Peter, speaking for the group, "You are the Messiah!"

Jesus strongly told them to not tell anyone.

Strange. Wonder why Jesus wanted his identity to be a secret? Perhaps it is because Peter did not really understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah.

After this part of the conversation, Jesus began to prepare the disciples for what was going to happen when they eventually get to Jerusalem. He told them that he was going to suffer and be rejected by the elders and the religious leaders. That this rejection would result in him being killed. Of course, this was such a shocking announcement that the disciples missed Jesus also telling them that he would be raised in three days. Can you blame them though? I mean no one typically comes back to life.

Now Jesus told this information to the disciples - in front of God and everybody.

Peter – and probably others – was NOT happy about what Jesus had to tell them. The Messiah is supposed to be a great military ruler who would kick out the Romans and re-establish the rule of David’s Monarchy over all of Israel. I mean, really, come on.

Peter was SO unhappy that he pulled Jesus off to the side and began to scold Jesus, almost like a parent would scold a misbehaving child.

Jesus was not taking any of that. He turned to get the other disciples’ attention. He told Peter, in front of everyone, that Peter was behaving like Satan, like a tempter. He told Peter – “Get behind me Satan. You have your mind set on earthly things, not on divine things.”

Ouch! That was harsh. But then again, Jesus was going to suffer greatly and die, he needed the disciples to pay attention. He needed the disciples to begin to pay attention to what **GOD** has in mind for the Messiah, not their own preconceptions.

To help them all along this journey, Jesus then begins to teach the group gathered with his disciples what it means to be one of his followers.

“If any of you want to come with me,” he told them, “you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for me and for the gospel, you will save it. ³⁶ Do you gain anything if you win the whole world but lose your life? Of course not! ³⁷ There is nothing you can give to regain your life. ³⁸ If you are ashamed of me and of my teaching in this godless and wicked day, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”ⁱⁱ

Wow. This is heavy stuff. It is costly to follow Jesus. It can even cost you your life.

At the end of the day, however, if we follow Jesus the way he has taught us, then Jesus will not be ashamed of us when he comes back to finish bringing in God’s Kingdom.

So, afterwards, Jesus and his group of followers move on from Caesarea Philippi and head through Galilee. Jesus really didn't want anyone to know he was there because he was focused on continuing to prepare the disciples for the events that still await them in Jerusalem. Namely, his arrest, death, and resurrection. The disciples didn't argue with him this time – they were too afraid.

Now we don't know what they were afraid of, but after the rebuke Peter got the last time, I doubt anyone wanted to disagree with Jesus.

When they finally got to the house in Capernaum, Jesus asked the group what it was they had been arguing about along the way. Now, I want you to note that Jesus didn't need to ask them, he already knew that they had been arguing about who was the greatest disciple among them.

Stop and think about this for a moment. Look at your neighbors here. Imagine you've been arguing with each other about who is the best cook, the best dressed, the best driver. Now Jesus pops into your group and says, "So, whatcha talking about?" Take a moment and think about that as a real event, right here.

Well, as you can imagine, the disciples said nothing. So, when they remained silent, Jesus began to teach them more about what it means to be a follower of his.

³⁵ Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all.” ³⁶ Then he took a child and had him stand in front of them. He put his arms around him and said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Talk about a shock. The disciples had been arguing about who was the greatest and Jesus tells them that being first isn't important. That if you want to truly be great, you must be a servant and put the needs of other people first. Even people who have nothing to give you in return, or people very new to faith, just like a little child.

When you welcome and care for the people who have no power or influence, it is as if you have welcomed Jesus himself, and not just Jesus, but our Holy God.

That is powerful. And challenging.

The first shall be last and the last shall be first.

Now Jesus must have gotten frustrated at this next part of the conversation. He is teaching his followers what it takes to be a disciple and John (one of Jesus' inner circle of disciples) pops up to interrupt Jesus with a complaint about someone outside of their

little group who had the nerve to cast out a demon in Jesus' name.

John tells Jesus that they went so far as to try to stop this outsider from healing in Jesus' name.

“What? You’ve got to be kidding me.”

That had to be what Jesus was thinking.

The Message translation of verses 39-41 puts it this way,

³⁹⁻⁴¹ Jesus wasn't pleased. “Don't stop him. No one can use my name to do something good and powerful, and in the next breath slam me. If he's not an enemy, he's an ally. Why, anyone by just giving you a cup of water in my name is on our side. Count on it that God will notice.^{iv}”

Can you imagine?

John, and others, felt threatened by this person who was healing in Jesus' name.

Why?

Maybe fear of losing position or prestige from being in the in crowd?

Whatever reason the disciples had, Jesus tells them to not stop him and to consider this other person as one of their own.

Jesus uses this opportunity to return to the child in his arms and his teaching of the disciples – tying it all in together.

Jesus was VERY descriptive in doing so – exaggerating just a bit to make his point.

⁴² “If anyone should cause one of these little ones to lose faith in me, it would be better for that person to have a large millstone tied around the neck and be thrown into the sea. ⁴³ So if your hand makes you lose your faith, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a hand than to keep both hands and go off to hell, to the fire that never goes out. ⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ And if your foot makes you lose your faith, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a foot than to keep both feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁶ ⁴⁷ And if your eye makes you lose your faith, take it out! It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to keep both eyes and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁸ There ‘the worms that eat them never die, and the fire that burns them is never put out.’^v

Wouldn't that get your attention?

⁴² “If anyone should cause one of these little ones to lose faith in me, it would be better for that person to have a large millstone tied around the neck and be thrown into the sea.

Remember, “little ones” here refers both to literal children, but also to new believers.

Followers of Christ are not only to care for those with no power and no status, like children, but followers are also to care for new or struggling believers in Jesus.

Followers of Christ are to put the needs of others first.

Followers of Christ are to put the needs of others first.

This truth is spelled out in the last part ...

Jesus tells the disciples,

⁴⁹ “For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ 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 was a very important commodity in the ancient world. Roman soldiers were actually paid in some instances with salt. It served not only to flavor foods, but as a preservative for foods. It was valuable.

To say that everyone will be salted with fire, means that followers of Christ will be tested and that testing of their faith will *improve* them.

Jesus encouraged the disciples to be like salt, to have salt in themselves – to flavor *and preserve* those in their care.

And just who is in their care? Everyone.

- Jesus makes this clear in his teaching that he is going to suffer, die and be raised to life – for *our* sake.
- Jesus makes this clear in his teaching about who is first and who is last – that those who are servants of all are who are important.
- Jesus makes this clear by pointing out that followers of Jesus in other groups are just as important as those in ***our*** group.
- Jesus makes this clear in his teaching about caring for children and “little ones” in their faith in Jesus – that followers are not to be a stumbling block for others to overcome.
- Ultimately, Jesus makes this clear in his last sentence for today – “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

And be at ***peace*** with one another.

Be at peace ***with one another***.

There are no qualifiers on this last phrase.

It isn't “be at peace with those in our church,” it isn't “be at peace with those people in our denomination,” it isn't “be at peace with people from our country, or who look like us or who believe like us.”

Jesus says to be at peace with one another.

Period.

Be at peace with one another.

This was hard for the disciples to hear. This is still hard for us to hear – if we are willing to admit it.

“Be at peace with one another” really sums up the last three weeks of passages and sermons.

“Be at peace with one another” really sums up the best we as followers of Jesus Christ can be towards the world.

“Be at peace with one another” doesn’t mean to abandon our faith or our beliefs.

“Be at peace with one another” means to treat everyone as if they are loved by God – for that is exactly what they are – loved by God.

Let us pray.

God, make the words we have heard a living word in the core of our being.

Help us put our faith in no other power than the power of your saving love.

Make us the agents of your love, blocking no one’s entrance into the presence of your love and grace.

Through Christ, enable us to be at peace with one another and to salt the earth with the power of your peace. Amen.^{vi}

ⁱ Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible are copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and are used by permission.

ⁱⁱ Good News Translation (GNT). Copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} The Message (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson.

^v Good News Translation (GNT). Copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society.

^{vi} <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/6269/worship-elements-september-26-2021>.