

October 5 2014

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 19

James 4:7-12

Luke 9: 46-50

Sermon *Division Street*

Well, today's Gospel lesson is not a long one by any means but it does contain even in these few little lines a rich amount of material not all of which are completely related to the same theme and so because we could never do justice to the entire passage today, I would like to draw your attention mainly and focus on the last few verses of the lesson.

This story is about John or rather the man, John and the other disciples found casting out demons in Jesus' name. As the story begins Jesus and the other disciples were gathered together in a house in Capernaum which is on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Just moments before this section starts, Jesus had taken a little child and used that child as an object lesson to drive home an important point. The lesson centered on the meaning of greatness and he wanted his disciples to realize that greatness in the eyes of God did not depend upon wealth, did not depend upon power, did not depend upon prestige instead greatness depends on the quality of person's faith in God and how this great faith causes a person to often reexamine of his or her life or alter his or her ways of living. This is a profound lesson but either John had forgotten what Jesus had said or wasn't really listening in the first place; Instead as the last section of the passage begins, John is bursting at the seams, bursting to tell Jesus how he and the other disciples had tested the greatness of another person that they had encountered out in the world but the test was not on the basis of the quality of the man's faith or rather it was based on whether or not the man belonged to the right group of people. It seems there was a man whom the disciples had encountered in their travels without Jesus who was casting out demons.

Now this is not bad in itself in their minds excepting the man was casting the demons out in the name of Jesus something the disciples seemed to feel their group had the exclusive right to do. Immediately, John and the other disciples stopped the man not for the quality of his work or the content of his faith but because he was not a part of their exclusive circle of the twelve. I'm sure John thought that Jesus would be extremely pleased by this act. After all who did this man think he was doing these things in Jesus' name outside of the one true and an authorized group? Besides he might not be doing his work in just the right way and that could certainly not be tolerated. Jesus however, as often he does, surprise the disciples by telling them to let the man go about his work stating, "That he that is not against us is for us". Upon hearing this surely the disciples were puzzled well as they might be but Jesus was really telling them that anybody could follow Jesus and could be part of his work regardless of who they are. Well in closer examination of the story it is a little more complicated than that. But Jesus did have an important point to make. If you remember the man casting out demons did so in fact in Jesus' name and for Jesus I think that is an important fact. Jesus reasoned that a person working against him working against God in essence could never succeed casting out demons, let alone casting them out in his name that man's work just would not stand the test of time. It was plain then Jesus explained that this man to was in some sense was a follower or disciples even though he was not a part of the exclusive group of the twelve and may not have worked exactly in the same way. Jesus then was telling the original twelve what I think he is telling us today this World Communion Sunday that following him and that loving God does not depend on being part of one particular group or practicing faith in one particular way. As Paul shared with us this morning James made this clear when he said these "Draw near to God and God will draw near to you". "Draw near to God" not to any particular group or particular set of practices. This is the key to our relationship with God.

This is a great image and I can use, now that I came back. There are a lot of cities like Spokane that have a division street. You know Division Street that humble stretch of road between here and down town

Spokane. It's a street that divides a town or city so a person can find the streets running north or south or east to the west. Sometimes it is Broad Street or Main Street but it serves the same purpose.

Now in a city this is a helpful device but unfortunately that many churches or many denominations also what I would call divisions streets running through the midst their people- customs, traditions, doctrines, or beliefs but extremely important to our faith but non-essential beliefs, non-essential practices can divide us from our Christian brothers and sisters and in the end weaken our work in the world around us. Being the loving caring people that God wants us to be is an important attribute all Christian people as well but when people fail, individual Christians often let bitterness, often let unforgiveness divide them from one to another within the Christian family and even here within our church. But Jesus advocated a different way, a way of love, a way of unity; a way of forgiveness, a way of putting aside petty differences for the sake of God's larger work in the world

This message can be very meaningful to us as we celebrate World Communion Sunday together today because many things still divides church from church and Christian from Christian all around the world- worship style, missions emphasis , church government, even national boundaries but nothing, nothing should stop us from coming together around God's Table to break bread, if we do it in the name of Jesus, I hope each one of us can practice this kind of radical inclusiveness, this radical acceptance not just within these four walls but as we encounters others out in the larger world. These are marching orders, I think this World Communion Sunday.

And together say AMEN