

**United Church of Christ Service 9/30/2012**  
**Scripture Lessons James 3:13-18**

*Mark 9:38-41*

**Sermon**        *Are You Fer Us or Again Us?*

**I don't care how old you are, I don't think any one of us has been able to watch television within the last 35 years, without seeing at least one episode of the Beverly Hillbillies. And if you recall the character Granny, you remember her to be a woman of great spunk. Always ready to jump into action, than to really think before she acted. More often than not, on any given episode, thru a series of comic misunderstanding, Granny's battle lines would be drawn to solve one crisis or another, more often than not, at the end of a double barrel shotgun with rock salt in the chambers, with this question resulting. "Are you fer us or are you again us?"**

**Are you fer us or are you again us?" Are you for us or are you against us? Well it is a black and white question that Jesus disciples might have asked in these lessons from Mark's gospel of the person John said was casting out demons in Jesus name, but was not part of that inner circle of 12 original disciples. Are you for us, or are you against us? We have spoken together before of the old biblical phenomenon of casting out of demons. And I have to confess to you that this is something I have had no personal experience whatsoever. At least in a literal sense.**

**As certainly with many of you I can look at an Adolf Hitler, I can look at a Joseph Stalin and I can see in their role in history, a kind of evil that can far outweigh the sum of its individual parts. But thank God, I have never experienced what in modern words would be called an exorcism, like the ones portrayed in scripture. From there we have sort of thought together, in terms of physical illnesses, that might be represented by the casting out of demons, maybe a chemical imbalance in a person's body, maybe epilepsy, or what I would call fighting personal demons, like depression or bitterness or greed in our lives. But however you and I see this whole phenomenon the casting out of demons in scripture, the question in the disciples mind was still the same question. "Is this man for us, or is this man against us?"**

**As usual, no matter who the gospel writer is, or what the episode in Jesus' life, somehow Jesus is able to transcend the given situation and**

**challenge his disciples of old and us as his modern day followers, to think outside the box about these things. To think beyond the black and white questions, to the deeper insights of faith.**

**First of all I think in this passage Jesus says, hey! if this guy's doing a good thing in my name, don't stop him, he can't be all bad. And then he leaves us with a short pithy statement to ponder. And it was shared with us by Nina in the scripture lesson. Whoever is not against us, is for us. Whoever is not against us is for us. Wow! How refreshing! How many more possibilities are opened up? How much more hope is possible in our world with Jesus' word than those of Granny Clampet, which are reflected in the thinking of Jesus disciples on that day.**

**Instead of going thru life negatively defining everything by what we are against, how about something new and refreshing? How about defining everything in life about what we are for in life, rather than what we are against? And again, instead of looking at others around us and judging them in their actions, on how we disagree, look at them and rejoicing in the way we do agree. Embracing our commonalities, rather than dwelling on the differences that we can easily find between ourselves and others.**

**You know Jesus could have done what his disciples did, He could have jumped to hasty judgments as we often do and replied to his disciples concerns, by saying these words. "Hey, you guys are right, he is not one of us, I don't care how much good this man doing, I don't even care if he is doing it in my name, he is not part of this one elite group that man has got to be stopped." But instead Jesus refused to follow a narrow all or nothing, throw the baby out with the bathwater ideology, in favor of pursuing what I would call the greater good. Pursuing what I would call a kindred spirit, knowing full well that he was not a part of Jesus' circle which was not all that perfect by the way, in the first place.**

**So how does Jesus' approach, how do Jesus' words shake out for us in the midst of daily life? Especially in the midst of this current political cycle? Well my take is that Jesus was so intent on us as his followers sharing the gospel. Sharing the good news of God's love for a hurting world, and everything we do, that he would have us put all other petty differences aside in pursuit of that one true good. Which means that whether we are dealing with family or friends, or we are dealing with co-workers, roommates, or members**

**of our own church family sometimes we have to do something that we don't often like to do. Sometimes we have to agree to disagree on some things. Or as some people have skillfully put it, to disagree agreeably about things. To work together for our common good.**

**There are so many small things, there are so many petty things, there are so many unimportant things that sidetrack us in our work of sharing God's love in this hurting world all around us, that we often hardly break the surface in solving the world's problems. So how about doing things a little differently this week? How about taking a different approach? Rather than jumping to hasty conclusions, about people and situations, rather than assuming the worst of people, rather than speaking before we think sometimes, which I can do really easily, we consider our commonalities with others, we consider where we agree rather than where we disagree. And rather than weakening and diluting our efforts, we gain strength, we gain strength together and cast out life's demons, not by ourselves, but in Jesus name, in Jesus name. Together we say, Amen.**