

## In the Name Of Jesus

Mark 9.38-41

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I recently read a story about an encounter between two theologians, one Jewish and the other Christian. The Jewish theologian asked his colleague, a Lutheran theologian, to imagine that he had found himself inside the pearly gates and that once inside God had taken him aside and told him he had been wrong all these years. "The Muslims" God said, "are correct and the Lutherans are wrong." The Rabbi waited for his colleague to respond. The Lutheran, a careful thinker with a good imagination, pondered the situation. "It's God who takes me aside?" he asked. "And this happens inside the pearly gates?" "Yes," the Jewish theologian said. "Then," the Lutheran said, "this would prove that Martin Luther had it right from the beginning: It is all grace and nothing but God's grace."<sup>1</sup>

In today's lesson Jesus dismantles the religious boundaries between "Us" and "Them," between those who are officially part of the Jewish Jesus Movement and everyone else working for peace and justice. After the disciples had been compassionately reprimanded for their distorted values (remember last week the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest), John attempts to dig them all out of the hole they accidentally dug, to regain their credibility, to demonstrate that their values are in line with Jesus'. To this point John tells Jesus that he can be proud of them for they recently stopped a man, who was not a disciple, from performing exorcisms in Jesus' name.

While I suspect Jesus' response, "Do Not Stop Him!" came as a surprise, it should not have been a surprise for the disciples nor for us. Jesus' response is essential, it is faithful, and it is timely.

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<sup>1</sup> *Provoking the Gospel of Mark – A Storyteller's Commentary*, Year B, Richard Swanson. The Pilgrim Press: Cleveland, 2005.

Jesus uses a verb form rarely found in scripture. An imperative verb – which means that what he is saying is an absolute instruction, a non-negotiable! All along Jesus has been affirming, validating, inviting in, raising up, equipping, empowering, and collaborating with people who are “outsiders” – those who were not Jewish as well as Jews who were not considered “pure” by Jewish standards. Inclusion is a foundational ethic of Jesus’ ministry! The disciples should have known this. They should have gotten this right.

Jesus’ response is also deeply Jewish and deeply faithful. Within Judaism there are two prayers that are essential to daily life: The Shema and prayer after meals. The Shema, the most important and oldest prayer in Judaism, having been recited morning and evening since ancient times, begins with the most fundamental expression of Jewish belief: ***Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.***

Judaism is a monotheistic faith. Jesus’ response to the disciples is rooted in a deep understanding of the implications of ethical monotheism – what it means to live, day in and day out, entrenched in this faith. If God who is God is truly One, and only One, then God must be God of all creation and cannot ever finally be the possession of any group to the exclusion of others. And as people who believed and professed a faith in the **One** God, Jesus and the disciples were not to claim God as only theirs or to deny God as present and active within and through others. To affirm God’s presence in religions that differ from Judaism, and for us from Christianity, does not depreciate the Jewish or Christian faith traditions (the ways in which we understand God, are in relationship with God, and serve God) but it does inculcate our humility before God in all things. The disciples should have known this. They should have gotten this right.

Jesus' response is also timely. His days are limited. He said, a few chapters earlier, that he is being betrayed; the betrayal inside the Jesus Movement has already begun. As the disciples travel with him, they are now taking the long way to their destinations, sometimes altogether avoiding places, because the religious authorities have increased their attacks on Jesus and are doing their best to entrap him. Jesus has told his disciples twice now that his death is imminent. Their situation is serious. A showdown is on the horizon. This is not the time, not that there ever has been or will be, to prohibit people from doing the work of peace and justice. The disciples should have known this. They should have gotten this right.

Scripture tells us that the man, who has not a follower of Jesus, was performing exorcisms in Jesus' name. Scripture also tells us that Jesus says, "No one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me." Jesus is known as the Christ. As the Messiah. As the one who is liberating the world from all forms of oppression. As the one who is initiating in The **One** God's Kingdom. A Kingdom saturated with the values of peace, truth, justice, freedom, and love. So, to act in the name of Jesus is to act in the name of these values. And once someone has acted in the name of Jesus, even doing such a simple task as offering a thirsty person a cup of water, once someone has stood up and stepped out for the values of The **One** God's Kingdom it will be difficult for that person to turn around and do the opposite. Once a person has acted for, and I would go even further to say, once a person's life has been improved by the values of The **One** God, they are forever changed. A seed has been planted. And while they may not be fully engrossed in and committed to the values of The One God, they are no longer flat-out opposed to these values - values which lead the Jesus Movement. As Jesus says, "Whoever is not against us is for us."

This week we saw a remarkable demonstration of people coming together in pursuit of the values of the One God and the One God's Kingdom: peace, justice, truth, freedom, and love. We saw men and women, gay and straight, young and old, poor and wealthy, Christian, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, Atheist, and Agnostic stepping up to speak out about and challenge the rhetoric about sexual assault – a rhetoric which minimizes the significance of sexual assault by discrediting the experiences and voices of those who have been assaulted. We saw four women (Dr Christine Blasey Ford, Julie Swetnick, Deborah Ramirez and Elizabeth Razor) put their careers, their comfort, their safety, and that of their families on the line to speak the truth about sexual assault. We saw two other women, Ana Maria Archila and Maria Gallagher speak truth about sexual assault and hold accountable those who are responsible for executing the process of justice. Dr Blasey Ford, Ms Swetnick, Ms Ramirez and Ms Razor all had one thing in common – ties to Supreme Court Nominee Brett Kavanaugh. In a very sick way, they were a closed group, and exclusive group, of which Ana Maria Archila and Maria Gallagher were not. Had Ms Archila and Ms Gallagher adhered to the boundaries championed by Jesus' disciples, they would have been disqualified from speaking to Senator Flake about their own experiences of sexual assault. Had they not rejected these boundaries and stepped up and spoken out, the courts of justice in our country would be decidedly, unequivocally a wealthy white men's club with their members receiving unlimited ethical and moral passes. Ms Archila and Ms Gallagher, by refusing to remain silent and insisting on being heard, influenced Senator Flake who changed his position and called for an FBI investigation into the allegations of sexual assault brought against Mr Kavanaugh.

Unlike Ms Archila and Ms Gallagher, the man in today's story and the people whom he healed have no names. They are unknown. All we know of him is what the disciples tell Jesus. He was not affiliated with the Jesus movement. He had not gone through the training of the Jesus Movement. He had not been vetted by the Jesus Movement. His credentials had not been reviewed by the Jesus Movement. His pedigree had not been validated by the Jesus Movement. He may not have even been a Jew. He was not qualified, according to them, to do anything in the name of Jesus. And yet, like Ms Archila and

Ms Gallagher, he refused to stay home and remain silent. He stepped up and stepped out healing people, saving people, in the name of Jesus, in the name of peace, justice, truth, freedom, and love.

PAUSE

The actions of the disciples in stopping this man from living out his ministry demonstrate that they understood the Jesus Movement to be a safe, private and privileged operation and restricting working in Jesus' name to the official group of disciples. As Jesus has been telling them and will soon show them, this ministry is **not safe**, it is **not private**, and is **not privileged**.

It is dangerous, requiring people to put their careers, their comfort, and their safety on the line.

This ministry is to be lived out in public because God's Kingdom is a public, communal experience.

And this ministry is not only for those who are deemed privileged, part of the "in" group. This ministry is to be lived by everyone for everyone because it comes from The **One** God, The **One** Creator of us all.

So, back to the theological exercise that I began this sermon with.

- What if the Muslims have it right?
- What if the Socialists have it right?
- What if the Humanists have it right?
- What if the Youth have it right?
- What if the Environmentalists have it right?
- What if the Vegans have it right?
- What if the guy sitting in his jail cell has it right?
- What if the single mom, working three jobs has it right?
- What if the teen covered in tattoos and piercings has it right?
- What if the child with Down's Syndrome bagging your groceries has it right?
- What if the bartender at the local watering hole has it right?
- What if the woman selling her body outside that watering hole has it right?

According to today's scripture we all participate in getting it right when we step up and step out  
in the name of peace, justice, truth, freedom, and love.

And according to the One whose name is peace, justice, truth, freedom, and love,

According to the One who insisted "Do Not Stop Him!"

According to the One who began and ended his day praying "**Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.**"

According to the One who gave up his life even to the point of death,

was always pointing back to The **One** God to whom he prayed;

According to the One who died because he refused to compromise his faith in The **One** God,

refused to change his **name**, and all for which it stood;

According to Him, though we do not all get it right all the time,

**by The One God's grace, we are all made right all the time.**

**All of us.**

So, we can stop quarreling about who is right and who is wrong,

who is in and who is out,

who is qualified to do the work and who is not.

And instead we can start working together to usher in the Kingdom of The **One** God.

**Amen.**