

Pentecost 19B

September 30, 2018

Rev Ken Wratten at St Luke's

Numbers 11:4-6,10-16,24-29 Eldad and Medad stayed in the camp.

Psalm 19:7-14

Keep from presumptuous sins

James 4:7-12

Humble yourselves before the Lord

Mark 9:38-43,45,47-48

Disciples tried to stop someone casting out demons in Jesus' name

From the Book of Numbers, Joshua wanted Moses to stop Eldad and Medad from prophesying, because they missed the prayer meeting. How dare they speak the Word of God!! But somehow God overlooked their absence, and shared His Spirit with them anyways.

In the Gospel lesson last week, Jesus' disciples were arguing over who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus expected their time with him to change them from the inside out; to transform them. But their sights were on being the exclusive club who would sit with Jesus in the heavenly realm.

In today's Gospel lesson, John told Jesus that he and the other disciples had 'caught' somebody they didn't know casting out demons in Jesus' name, and they told him to stop. HOW DARE THIS MAN CURE PEOPLE? Jesus told John not to stop him; since he was doing God's work. Even outside the group of 12, Jesus' power to heal was there. The church isn't free of this need to define who is in and who is out.

The Eastern Orthodox churches say that only they are "the one true church of Christ on earth." In the Catholic Church, in 1302, Pope Boniface VIII issued a papal bull, *Unum Sanctum* which said, "We declare, say, define, and pronounce that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff." My experiences of God in my life do not accept the premise that God only allows one way to worship Him. THIS church is my preference, but it doesn't make sense to me that only we have valid worship.

The Protestant Reformation of the late 1500's coincided with Bibles starting to be translated from Latin into the common language of the people. Protestants helped distribute Bibles so that people could read and interpret Holy Scriptures for themselves; for the first time outside of the institutional church. This fueled the tendency for lots of new Protestant denominations, some believing that they understood the Bible better than the group they left. There are plenty of examples of exclusivity in the church.

But Moses modeled including anyone who shows God's work in what they do. Jesus taught his disciples to avoid at all costs impeding someone else from doing God's work. It would be better if a great millstone were hung around our neck...

Our charge from Mark and from James is to be creative, inspired, humble, and open to partner with whoever we can, to make our works of ministry as effective as possible; to multiply the impact of our ministries; and to attract other people to join us. The in-vogue term for this is Community Organizing.

Jesus wanted his disciples to keep their ego in check; and to honor anyone who serves God, even if that work comes from somebody who has never met him. The message from James is to WALK THE WALK of being the people of God. We are to pray for each other; and help each other stay faithful. We are to show the world that our faith transforms us, and that we want to work with anybody who can help us bring honor to God.

Years ago I took my yearly vacation from work to be trained as a Stephen Leader. I started recruiting and training new Stephen Ministers. Then the formal process began of assigning care receivers to these trained caregivers. At one of our monthly meetings someone shared that during coffee hour, while they were talking with church members, they knew they had learned things in our training that would have helped. But they didn't say anything because they had not been assigned to them as a care giver. REALLY? I told the whole caregiver group that these are tools to share generously, wherever they can, whenever it will help people. Being Christians is radical inclusion, not exclusion.

The message from these Scripture readings is that our lives as followers of Jesus Christ should be visible to the people around us as transformed lives – and the transformation should convey to people that we are blessed, we are sent out, and we are meant to be a blessing to others.

About being sent, John 20:21, “As the father has sent me, I am sending you.” We push our comfort zone because Christ wants us to.

About being a blessing to others, that is the second part of the Gospel reading today. All the extreme statements about losing a hand, or a foot, or an eye, are hyperbole to make the point that we must never let what we are doing, or where we go, or what we see, stand in the way of supporting and being a blessing to anyone who furthers God's work. We are to serve, and to assist others who serve, wherever we find that happening; In the mission work in the Virgin Islands (supporting the missionary), from our Christian Preschool (supporting our teachers), with visits to Chamberlains, or with the Food Bank projects...

What does the future of our parish look like to you? How can we be more inclusive in our works of ministry, and more creative in our support of other people's ministry? I pray that God empowers us in being ever-faithful servants. Amen.