

## SERMON

### “UNPACKING JESUS’ TRUTH”

*Preaching text: Mark 9:38-50*

I like to keep things picked up at the apartment Kurt and I live in. I’m not a germaphobe by any means but I like things to be in their place. How many of you have a junk drawer? I have two: one in the kitchen and one in my bedroom. Kurt has his own junk drawer in his room.

As someone who likes to keep things picked up junk drawers are necessary. It always seems like there are a few things that don’t really have their own place. You can’t just leave them out, so they go in the junk drawer.

Our gospel reading for today for today is kind of like a junk drawer. It is almost as if Mark had some unrelated material. He didn’t know where to fit it in, so he just threw it in the same “drawer.” There are two themes I’d like to highlight.

Our gospel begins with John saying to Jesus, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” Jesus responded to the disciples by saying, “Do not stop him ... whoever is not against us is for us.”

I read these words as encouragement for us to work with others not like us. Christianity can become so fragmented. It is estimated that there are about 2 billion Christians in the world today. But we aren’t all in the same church, are we? That’s because people disagree with each other and decide that they can’t be a part of the same church. It’s tragic and our mission suffers. So rather than looking for things that divide us ... we should affirm that we have oneness in Jesus.

Another truth from Jesus that we find here is when he said, “If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off ... if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off ... and if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out ...” Otherwise you’ll end up in hell in each instance.

I have a friend who is a hunter. Once he told me about a trapline he had for smaller animals. One morning he was making the rounds of his trapline ... and he

came across one of the traps that had been sprung. In it was the front leg of a weasel. That's all that was in it! The weasel's leg was caught in the trap ... but his instinct wouldn't let him stay caught ... so he chewed his leg off. He gave up that part of his body to be free. There is a great principle of life there.

The same principle comes up in medicine. Physicians have realized for a long time that killing a little can save a lot ... that giving up a part can preserve the whole. Thus, there is complete agreement when the doctor says to take out a cyst or a tumor. If it's not cut out and there is cancer, often those cells have to be bombarded with radiation so that they might die, and life allowed to continue.

The instinct for survival and the miracles of modern medicine ... they illustrate what Jesus was talking about. Each one of us ... at one time or another ... gets caught up by things, people or events which are a real threat to the quality of our spiritual lives. Unless we learn how to cut them loose ... these powers can separate us from God.

What do we need to cut out? The answer is ANYTHING that stands in the way of reaching the life to which God calls us. What is keeping you from having a more complete, more fulfilling, more satisfying relationship with God? For many people it's materialism ... the quest for things ... the illusion that we can take care of all our needs ourselves. Oh, we can do that for a while ... we can use our resources just for ourselves. But when we come to the end of our days on earth ... will God be impressed with how we have used what God has given us?

One of the practices of our day is a thing called CHURCH SHOPPING ... that is ... when people are looking for a church home ... they shop around ... they investigate other churches. Now, I have no criticism of that, it's not a bad idea. But I am against CHURCH SHOPLIFTING ... that is ... where people are more concerned with "What's in it for me?" ... rather than ... "How can I help?"

Consider the world we live in ... school shootings and other random violence, child abductions, our changing climate ... they all point to the fact that we are playing for some pretty high stakes. Jesus calls us to cut loose from irresponsibility in order that we might make a difference for others.

So, this morning I encourage you to be open to working with others, especially those not like you. As the news regarding the Afghans and Haitians shows, this is a multicultural land we live in. People live here from all over the world. Jesus encourages us to be able to relate to all people. Especially people different than us.

And, what needs to be cut out of your life? You can think of it in the framework of our faith. Do you need to give something a Good Friday so you can experience an Easter-like new beginning?

Both show that Jesus wants the best for your life. I pray that you can make decisions that help you have the full, loving life God wants for you.

**AMEN.**