

Mark 9: 42-50

42 'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. ⁴³If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

49 'For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'

Meditation: This is a difficult passage, and it's difficult for several reasons. First, the imagery of cutting off bodily parts is grotesque and shocking. The mention of hell or "the unquenchable fire" doesn't help. The imagery of hell was a popular one in Jesus' day and everyone believed in it more or less. Hell raises the stakes of what it takes to make it into the "kingdom of God."

And this brings us to the second point. If 'cutting off our limbs' is what it takes to make it into the kingdom of God, how many of us will get there? Yes, Jesus is pretty blunt about what it will take. We have to be all in, and when choices have to be made that will cost us, choices that also involve giving up and letting go as much as they are about taking up commitments, responsibilities and making sacrifices... that's no less difficult than losing some limbs. How much is our identity as a Jesus-follower a life-style for us where we're all in?

Ok, so what would this involve? The passage tells us right at the beginning: "If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me..." Who are these little ones? They are any who are vulnerable, vulnerable to abuse, vulnerable to being taken advantage of, vulnerable to being downtrodden, ignored, neglected... It is those who are most vulnerable to contracting the virus and dying from it because they have few physical, mental and financial resources to stay safe and healthy. Where is this happening in our care homes and streets, for example? What does this say about us as a society? Our commitment as Jesus-followers is to grow to become 'salt,' to have some real flavour in our lived-out faith. It's also about being "at peace with one another" in a world of anxious restlessness, judgement, competition and everyone out for themselves and their own.

How are you planning to live out your Christianity in the days, months and years ahead? Are there any 'limbs' that need to be cut off because they are excess weight and negative mental and spiritual baggage? What attachments need to be rethought and given up? What commitments need to be taken up or renewed? How are we going to become salt in the world around us?

Prayer: I need health, O God, body, mind and spirit... I need to be part of a world where the "little ones" are cared for, not neglected, abused and overrun in the busyness all around me and the restless craving, weariness and dissatisfaction within me. Meet me today, O God... Find me... Carry me... Convict me... Heal me... Renew me... Make me salt so I can have some real flavour... the flavour of your love... Amen.