**9/29/24**

**Hyperbolic Metaphors & Salt**

**Mark 9:38-50 (NRSV)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Welcome to all of you! We are glad that you have joined us here in this very space, whether you are physically in the pews or virtually on the conference call, you are a vital part of our community. We look forward to learning and growing together in worship as we become saltier together…. Nope, that is not exactly what I was trying to say there…. Let me try that again…. We look forward to learning and growing together in worship as we determine how to handle our issues with our blood pressure…. Nope, that was not it either…. Let me try one last time here…. We look forward to learning and growing together in worship as we make sure that we all have enough to quench our thirst after that very salty food…. Sorry, I tried folks.

Alright, if you have not guessed it by my bad jokes by now, then let me let you in on the fact that this Sunday all too often becomes entirely a focus on salt. You know that simple yet profound ingredient that is in our food to either give it taste or to preserve it? I am quite sure that many of you out there in the pews, and on the conference call, have heard plenty of sermons over the years delivered about salt. I of course debated following the same course of action, because it definitely is a topic extremely worth hitting. It also is a topic that has a lot written about it in order to review and research. However, I felt that you and I were all salty enough…. Sorry…. There goes my bad humor again…. Okay, let me try this again…. I felt the need to abandon the topic of salt almost completely, and focus on what I have found to be the more awkward and even more vital piece of our Gospel Reading. You know that extremely awkward part smack dab in the middle where we are told to remove things if they cause us to stumble? Yep, that would be where I am going to dive in today! So, as I scan the room here… How many of you are missing a hand, a foot, or even an eye because that is what scripture told you to do?

Is it fair enough to say that verses 43 to 48 over the years have really seemed to catch us all off guard? It is even fair enough to say that they have caught us so off guard that we have even been accepting of just chalking them up to something we may not need to hear or read, and we move right on past them. I am also pretty sure that is exactly why most pastors choose to ignore them or avoid them as well when it comes to addressing them up here at this very pulpit. Now, it may very well be that it is because it actually is pretty rough to explain unless you are provided with the very opportunity that I was at my last pericope study with the Pastors this past Monday in Somers Point. Through this very study and discussion, I of course got introduced to a new term, and that term was hyperbolic metaphors. I was so excited by it that I came home and shared it with my wife later that day, and she just kind of shook her head and moved on to another topic. I am not too sure why she did not share my same excitement about hyperbolic metaphors, but that’s okay. Now, I know you might be out there shaking your head and thinking of having the very same reaction Heather did, and of course tuning me out. Maybe you really would just prefer that I move on to the all too common and simple topic of salt. However, I also thought that you might actually be scratching your head and wondering what exactly this all means. Just maybe you might have never been the one to speak up and ask questions about it even though you really wanted to. So, whatever camp you are in, I am going to invite you to break this down with me. Let me no longer keep this education and discussion in the confines of a Pastoral Bible Study. Bing.com had to offer that “A hyperbolic metaphor is a figure of speech in which the expression is an evident exaggeration of the meaning intended to be conveyed. The analogy is deliberately inappropriate, but the exaggeration tells us the writer's view about the original idea. Hyperbolic metaphors are used to make a point or to create a vivid image in the reader's mind.” (11) So, I think we can place a check mark next to all of those distinct breakdowns of the term, and what we have heard here for sure smack dab in the middle of our Gospel Reading. For that fact, my very bad jokes to start out the sermon seemed to have lined up pretty well with that definition as well.

Now, I am sure that we all can be in agreement that we often need a picture painted for us that is simply so awkward or disturbing that we have to slow down in order to really take it in. Of course, it is easy to push right on past it at times as well. We can move right on to another place in the gallery, we can move on to another thought or topic in our minds, or we can move right on to another chapter or study lesson. However, that is not what we are called to do when we explore scripture. We are called to really break things down and even make these awkward pictures make sense. We are called to make the Word and the message really come alive in our thoughts and minds, and for one another as well. So, as we do this let me revisit things and ask you how many of you out there are fired up about going out and removing a hand, a foot, or even an eye because they have made you stumble? How many of you think that most of us would not have much left, and we all would be gimping around if we took these verses very literal?

Following that mindset and those questions, how many of you now kind of get where this is really going? I mean it has total connection to the start of our Gospel Reading where we at first were focused on the disciples calling into question those out there doing the very same work that they were doing, but just not being part of their group. We learn that those other folks were not doing anything wrong, but they were just doing things a little differently, and for that fact they were just taking a little bit of the shine or the disciple’s credit. However, Jesus reassures them in verse 40 that “Whoever is not against us is for us.” (2) The words we hear today also hearken back to last week’s message as well, with the focus being on the child. This is precisely where the Gospel writer trails back into an unfinished story, and reminds you and I that Jesus still has that very child in his hands and remains focused on them too. Jesus reminds each and every one of us that children are believers and are very present everywhere he travels, and that is even despite them not being spoken about often. Furthermore, he is extremely focused on all of us, including the disciples back then, not causing any issues or harming the children, or even limiting their very education and focus. We get some pretty harsh words from Jesus as a matter of fact in the tail end of verse 42, and we are actually told that if we cause harm to the children “it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.” (2) That right there is pretty telling of how important Jesus felt there should be care and love for all, including the small or the least of these. Then to further the message along we even hear in verse 41 today, “For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.” There is reward for all that we do right in Christ’s name!

Through all of this we also learn that all of these topics are related because they speak of our nature to care for each other and build each other up, to protect one another, as well as not to place blame on one another as if we have done no wrong or as if we have committed no sin at all. Yes! I just went there as a matter of fact…. That is precisely what verse 48 is telling us, for hell and the grave will never be happy until they get all of you and I. So, we need not remove things that cause us to stumble, but we need to admit or confess what we did wrong. We need not hurt ourselves or make ourselves weaker, but we need to constantly rebuild ourselves and others back up for our kingdom work. That is the very true nature and power of grace here folks! You and I are blessed and privileged enough to be provided with it today and every day for that fact! This is precisely where we come to realize that Jesus has paid the eternal price for each and every one of us, and he laid his life on the line and suffered all the way to the cross for you and for I. We also need to remember that it did not end at the cross, and we live as resurrection people. He did all of this so that we would not have to. Jesus did it because he loved each and every one of us unconditionally. So, we need to ensure that we continue to build one another up and not tear one another down. This is precisely where I am going to dig into things just a little bit more here as we begin wrapping things up. Any yes, that very topic of salt is going to come up here in the tail end of this message, and that is simply because it has to!

So, I would say that we all have learned a lot from these few short verses here today. I would even venture to say that we can all now look at things with just a little different of a viewpoint the very next time this reading comes up in our three-year lectionary cycle. We no longer need to shy away from the middle of the reading and be greatly confused or scared by it. That is the very blessing of us coming together as a community each week to explore the Word together. We actually purify one another through the very fire that we create when we make the decision to show up or call in for our Worship Service. We open our very hearts and minds to the Word, and to one another. We exhibit a sense of vulnerability through trust and love in and for one another. We make the sign of the cross during our Worship Service at various times to remind ourselves of the fact that “In our baptism we “bear the name of Christ” and have been salted with the fire of God’s spirit.” (1) We come together and realize that as “Christians (we) are to flavor the world with righteousness and preserve it from rot by being the salt of the earth.” (1) Verse 50 rings ever so true here, for “if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it?” (2) We will never lose our saltiness as long as we stay committed to one another. This is why I thank you week in and week out for making the commitment to join one another in this very community during our Worship Service. It is vital that we do so in order to continue to grow and learn, and so that we can share that very same care and love to and with one another just like Jesus has taught us.

I found these words in a sermon by Joel Pankow very deep and important to share with you all to paint just a few last images and change your mindset just a little bit more. “We live by continuing to die. We can spiritually pluck our eyes out as we close them in prayers of repentance. We can cut our hands off when we fold them in prayer to our Lord. We can render our feet inactive when we get on our knees to pray. In these ways we put to death the things that want to lead us into hell, as we continue to cling to Jesus for forgiveness.” (10) As we entertain following these very actions we also come to realize that it is our call and commission to not just keep the message to ourselves, but to go out there in the world and to salt the community while providing the flavor and love of Christ to everyone else as well.

Amen and Amen.

**References & Study Points**

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 Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

 Jesus declared children a sacrament of God’s presence, and his own

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 suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection (8:31)

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 Commentary on Mark 9:38-50

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**Mark 9:38-50 (NRSV)**

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus teaches his disciples about ministry that involves service and sacrifice. His disciples are slow to realize that these words apply to them as well as to others.

38John said to [Jesus], “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” 39But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40Whoever is not against us is for us. 41For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

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.”

**(Not Used)**

**Theme Statement: What is God doing in or behind this text?**

**(Active verb, saving or empowering action, complete thought, and a simple short sentence)**

**(Not Used)**

**Four Page Method**

**Page One (Trouble in the Text) (Characters Only)**

**Page Two (Trouble in the World) (Us Only)**

**Page Three (Grace in the Text) (God & Characters)**

**Page Four (Grace in the World) (God & Us)**

**Sermon Unity Elements: The Tiny Dog Now Is Mine**

**Text (41-42):** Mark 9:38-50 (NRSV)

**Theme (42-48):** Repentance, care, and love for ourselves and one another

**Doctrine (48-50):** Salvation

**Need (50-52):** Strength and Building Up

**Image (52-56):** Child and Salt

**Mission (56-57):** Salt the world with the Word and Christ’s love.