

God Drove by in a Ford; I Didn't See God 'cuz I'm a Chevy Guy'

18 Pentecost B Sept 26, 2021 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed

Mark 9:38-50

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. ⁴²If 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.”

Introduction

Someone who isn't part of Jesus' own circle is casting out demons in Jesus' name, and the disciples want him stopped. They appeal to Jesus, as Joshua did to Moses about the elders who prophesied without official authorization. Like Moses, Jesus refuses to see this as a threat. Jesus welcomes good being done in his name, even when it is not under his control. The circle we form around Jesus' word must be able to value good being done in ways we wouldn't do it, by people we can't keep tabs on.

Overview - Don't Try to Stop God

In Mark 9:38-50 the disciples—at least John—are upset because they saw somebody, not a disciple, “casting out demons” in Jesus' name. Here John sounds strikingly similar to the Pharisees, who became upset when someone out of their control, Jesus, healed a person on the sabbath (Mark 3:1-6). A common tendency among religious leaders seems to be uneasiness with God acting in ways that are outside of the expected channels and outside of their control.

Throughout Mark's gospel we are reminded that God's activity and power are not controlled by or limited to established religious institutions. This point is made clear in the opening verses of the gospel. Mark doesn't begin the story of the "good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1) in Jerusalem, where one might expect the story of a holy person to start. Instead, the beginning of Mark's gospel takes us to the wilderness, a place often associated with the absence of God's presence. But it is precisely in the wilderness where we find John, proclaiming that "the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15).

There was a sense in Jesus' time that God could or would only be present in the temple, and that God's activity was determined by the actions of the religious leaders. We have the same temptation today. We often think of what happens in the church building as God's activity, but forget that God is also present and acting in the world outside the church. We often think of Christians doing God's work, but neglect to notice the ways in which non-Christians are also active in doing things that help to bring God's kingdom near. Jesus' response to his disciple's consternation about the fact that someone who is not a disciple is casting out demons in Jesus' name is an important instruction to us as well. We shouldn't stop someone who is doing God's will and bringing God's kingdom near, just because they aren't a part of our group. In fact, we may even want to learn more about what they are doing, and join them!

Pop Culture

Studies have shown that even if the competing product is less expensive and of higher quality, if the buyer has a preexisting loyalty, forget about it—very rarely does a brand-loyal person make a switch (Jayson DeMers, ["The Psychology of Brand Loyalty: 5 Key Takeaways,"](#) *Entrepreneur*, August 14, 2017).

- A) Know anyone who has their opinions about many things so set that getting a word in edgewise is nearly impossible? They often don't even realize how they impose their perspective upon others in all kinds of ways. What biases or pre-determined thinking did you grow up with?.....about certain things, people, thinking, topics, rituals (birthdays/holidays), religious ideas, etc. What do you see was the disciples bias in the gospel passage?
- B) While the most direct and public ministry paths are found through the church, God is not confined or defined only by the church. God is loose in the world; we

just try our best to catch up with where God is already at work. What is your favorite ministry activity that LCR is currently doing? What ministry activity would you wish LCR to be doing? (Please tell the office!) What would it take to have you get involved in that ministry? What would you consider a ministry that is taking place in the community/among your friends/neighbors that is bringing forward God's Hope, Healing, Sense of Wholeness, or Justice for others?

C) Can you name some of your friends who are doing some type of ministry that they would NEVER call ministry because they don't see themselves as being religious?

D) What do you see as some of the biggest needs in our neighborhood that God c/should address?...and perhaps God can use our hands and energies to make that happen.....so please suggest it to the office or grab some friends and start to address it or ask for some help to do so (just let us know!).