

"The Power of The Engaged Life"

Mark 9:38-50

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+9:38-50)

Dr. David W. Swink

Chilson Hills Church, Brighton, Michigan

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In Mark 9:50 (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+9:50), **Jesus says, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."**

During the last few weeks I have attempted to articulate a way of living that follows Jesus Christ along the "grace path." Several weeks ago I laid out a map for the spiritual journey as I see it. On one level was God's law which included two dangerous side camps: legalism and cheap grace. I then suggested that the higher climb up God's mountain was to reach the grace level. Grace combines God's eternal law with God's eternal love. Grace brings God's justice together with God's mercy. Grace is an unearned, free gift from God express mailed to each and every human being on the face of this planet. God in Christ reconciles and redeems the world. The "grace path" is one that runs counter to our immediate self centeredness and the cultural values of immediate gratification. Therefore, taking the "grace path" involves a personal choice. Your choice to walk the "grace path" will involve self sacrifice, new ways of thinking and talking, as well as some rejection on the part of persons who are, as yet, unwilling to walk with you.

Two weeks ago I discussed several key sign posts on the "grace path." One sign post is the willingness to focus our lives in the engagement of building up God's Kingdom on this earth. I suggested that we need to be ready to move beyond romantic denial to actually be engaged in God's life transforming work of healing the wounded, freeing the imprisoned, uplifting the downhearted, and sharing the good news of God's presence among us.

Last week I urged us to take seriously Jesus' teaching of being a servant leader for the world. I urged us to step beyond the cultural value of the immediate gratification of our desires. I recommended that you find some way to integrate Jesus' values into your everyday living. One suggestion I shared was to ask "What would Jesus do?" in the everyday, small decisions of our lives.

This week I want to take us one step further upon the grace path. I want to challenge us as a Christian community to declare our Church a Shalom Zone. In **Mark 9:50** (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+9:50), Jesus says, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other." For us to understand the challenge packaged in these words, we must go back to the encounter Jesus' disciples have with the unnamed exorcist.

This exchange between Jesus and His disciples is a bit ironic since, shortly before this conversation, (**Mark 9:14-29**) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+9:14-29), the disciples were unable to exorcise the unclean spirit from a young boy. The disciples tried to heal the boy, but they failed. Then this unknown, unlicensed, unapproved exorcist shows up and heals people. See? The disciples are criticizing this unknown exorcist for doing what they have failed to do, namely to cure somebody. Let's say they knew the right words, let's say they had watched Jesus do it a hundred times, but when it came their turn to heal, they failed. So when they ran across this uncredentialed, unlicensed exorcist running around out there casting out demons in Jesus' name, they ran to tell Jesus about it.

"Rabbi, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But 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. Whoever is not against us is for us."

It is not unusual for healers and exorcists to be within the towns and villages of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee region was the "Mayo Clinic" of ancient Rome. There were world renowned hospitals at the southern end of the lake. Demon possession was a generic term used for many diseases at this time of world history. Therefore, what the disciples are complaining about is a common place occurrence in the everyday life of the village of Capernaum. The main problem is that this man using Jesus' name to heal was not an authorized disciple. John wants this upstart disciplined and stopped. The man was using Jesus' name, but he was not one of the twelve. Notice, if you will, the disciples are not thrilled over the healing of the person. Their attention is somewhere else. They are only interested in who is in the circle and who is out of it.

A journalist once asked Carl Sandburg, "What is the ugliest word in the English language?" After a few minutes Sandburg replied, "Exclusive." The ugliness of exclusive depends upon whether we are among the included or the excluded. Some people pride themselves on being members of exclusive clubs, living in exclusive neighborhoods, dining at exclusive restaurants, vacationing at exclusive resorts, belonging to exclusive churches. Being an insider carries with it a sense of pride and security. Most of us, however, have been excluded often enough to agree that exclusive is an ugly word. When we were among the marginalized, the rejected, the pushed-aside, or the left out, we know it hurts!

Sibling Rivalry is rejected in God's Family!

This need to draw the line and exclude in order to feel good and secure is a part of the human condition. Psychologists call it sibling rivalry. The very first case of sibling rivalry is recorded among the first family. Cain is jealous of the attention and affection that Able receives. Therefore, Cain kills his brother. Cain then asks God if he is really his brother's keeper. Notice Cain's question is as far off target as is John's to Jesus. Cain is not ever to be Able's keeper, Cain is Able's brother! John is not to be concerned with who is in or out of the Jesus' circle. John is to be concerned with how Jesus' name is healing the hurts of humanity.

When we label another person, so that we can exclude them, we are participating in a most ancient form of sin. When we create stereotypes of persons based upon their color, their nationality, their gender, or anything else we are missing the Christ focus. When we seek to determine who is on the right or wrong side of God in relationship to a political issue, a theological doctrine, or a cultural practice, then we are setting up an occasion for the "little ones" of God to be harmed.

Let me be even more specific. The Christian church is torn apart by well meaning people for whom a political/moral/doctrinal agenda is more important than God's grace. Let me name just a few issues from the last 75 years:

- doctrinal purity on any number of issues;
- war or pacifism;
- divorce or not;
- abortion or pro-life;
- euthanasia or not;
- the homosexual lifestyle;
- women's rights and role in the church and society including the right to vote;
- card playing, watching television and movies, and dancing; drinking alcohol or not; and the list could continue.

Am I suggesting that we should not hold our beliefs with strength, clarity, and forthrightness. Absolutely not! The reverse is true. I believe that Jesus calls us to state our belief's publicly with as much strength as we can muster. Articulating our belief's is not the issue. Drawing the exclusive line is the issue. Saying, "If you do not believe the way I believe, you cannot be a Christian." is the issue. When we assume that God can only be on our side and no one else's, we create an attitude of self-righteousness that can only divide and harm the Church of Christ. It is the attitude of exclusivism that is the problem.

Let me take this issue one step further. The basis of sibling rivalry is the need and the desire for the attention and love of the parent. Where sibling rivalry is strong, there is an insecurity, a fear of being unloved, unappreciated, and uncared for. If we can capture Jesus' message that God is greater than anything we can imagine.

- God loves everyone of us as if we were the only child in the universe.
- God loves each of us with complete attention and care.

We do not have to work hard to be on the right side, so that we can be loved. We do not have to work hard to impress the Lord, so that Christ will accept us. In and through the work of Christ, we are accepted. We are redeemed. We are saved. We are loved. We are cared for completely. We do not have to be concerned whether or not someone is following Jesus in the right way. We can let God be God and do the work of deciding who is right. Just think Al Sharpton and Pat Robertson are both members of God's Family! God is so great that God can love everyone on the right and the left and in between!

Jesus wants us to focus our attention upon being salt in the world and living at peace with each other. Jesus wants us to be:

- So filled with the Spirit that we do not have to reject someone who is different.
- So filled with faith that we do not have to categorize another person.
- So filled with God's power that we can focus on the servant work God places before us and live in peace with others who are different.

Let us reaffirm this community as a:

“Holy Shalom Zone”.

We are and will be:

- A people living God's peace.
- A community where sinners can find God's acceptance and forgiveness.
- A community where wounded persons can be healed.
- A community where the spiritually blind can find God's eye sight.
- A people so in love with God that the political/moral/doctrinal issues are respectfully debated in a spirit of mutuality and love.

Jesus says that you no longer need to be concerned with whether God loves you. God knows your name. God knows how many hairs are on your head. Be secure in God's love and let go of the need to find exclusivity. Replace that old sibling rivalry habit with the commitment to be salt in the world.

You can be energized here with God's peace and share God's peace as you engage in everyday life. In the movie *Wonderous Oblivion* a Jamaican family develops a friendship with a Jewish family. The young Jewish boy wants to learn how to play cricket. Watch as honest dialogue brings respect and the beginning of a friendship.

Film Clip from Wingclips.com: Wonderous Oblivion: A Jewish Boy

We can be Savory Salt to season a bland world!

Salt is a flavor enhancer. Salt provides for us a taste that we all enjoy. Try eating a boiled egg without salt. You quickly appreciate the flavor of salt. Jesus wants us to be the kind of people that enhance life. We are called to build up life. We are invited to live life abundantly. Let us be people who seek to live, to share, to grow, and to enjoy the miracles of life. The virtuoso Arthur Rubenstein said this of life: “I am passionately involved in life: I love its changes, its colors, its movement. To be alive, to be able to see, to walk, to havemusic.....it's all a miracle. I have adopted the technique of living life from miracle to miracle.” Such salty talk, Jesus loves. Jesus wants you to be salty as you love life each day. Be a flavor enhancer in Jesus' name.

Salt is a purifying agent. Offer your life to God as a pure sacrifice. Seek to work in your own life to rid yourself of the destructive habits, the negative thinking, the greed and self-centeredness. Seek to become a purifying agent in your home and family by living a disciplined prayerful life. I challenged a person to pray for her estranged husband. She thought me insane. I suggested that she visually place him in God's hand and leave him to God. She wanted him dead, not loved by God. But, she began to pray. She disciplined herself to pray for him everyday. And, God created a miracle. Communication was restored. And her anger was purified. She became Christ's purifying salt in that situation.

Salt is a preservative. Salt is used to keep food from becoming rancid and spoiled. Offer your life to God as a salt for the world in Christ's name. There are pools of rottenness within our community. Seek with humility and love to share the salt of Christ within the ugliness that confronts you. Several years ago one of our members was attacked for being connected with our Church. Ugly words were thrown at our friend. They were told that their family was not good enough to be considered Christian. Their children were not

Christian enough to be associated with the children of this family. Religious bigotry is an ugly cess pool. Our friends kept quiet in the face of this ugliness. They left without retaliating. They turned the other cheek.

They refused to cast pearls before the swine. In short, humbly they walked the salty walk of Jesus. They preserved the peace of God in a very difficult situation. Only God knows how their witness of powerful humility will be used. But, it will be used, for God's glory.

If you can focus on living a Christ filled, salty life each day. If you can go from miracle to miracle with humility, sharing Christ's abundant love. If you can be concerned about purifying the dirt out of your own eye, rather than worrying about the speck of dust in someone else's eye. Then, Christ can create a shalom zone out of this community here at Chilson Hills. I pray that we can "Have salt in ourselves, and be at peace with each other and the world."