

## “I’m Telling Jesus on You”

### Mark 9: 38-50

Sometimes it is very difficult for the preacher to make a Biblical text that was written some two thousand years ago relevant for us modern day readers. Here’s why I say this. Within the very first few lines of our text this morning, we hear about people who state that they are disciples of Christ claiming to have exclusive rights to Jesus and his teachings. Within the first few lines of our text, we have people who profess to be disciples of Christ claiming to be the only ones who know exactly what Jesus is thinking at any given moment. We have people who profess to be disciples of Christ claiming that they are the only ones who have the right to Jesus’ power. Within the very first few lines of our text this morning, we have people who follow Jesus as his disciples here on earth, claiming to have exclusive rights to the Kingdom of God.

Now as I said, sometimes it is very difficult for the preacher to make Biblical texts relevant for modern day readers because well, let’s face it. We just don’t understand this type of argumentative situation when it comes to Jesus. As modern day disciples, we simply don’t know what Mark is trying to describe in this passage because well, we’ve never experienced or heard people claim to have

exclusive rights to the Kingdom of God. Sometimes it is really hard to make a Biblical text relevant because no one nowadays would ever, I mean ever, profess to be a disciple of Christ and then turn around and claim that they are the only ones who understand the will and Word of God. That just doesn't happen nowadays. So what is a preacher to do when we come upon a text like this one from Mark that is so different from our own experience as disciples...you know our experience where all the churches get along, where there is no fighting over territory, where there are no social media arguments about which church is best. You know our experience where everyone embraces the understanding that there are multiple ways to interpret Biblical passages...

I trust that everyone can all hear the sarcasm in my voice. Because unfortunately, we can relate exactly to what Mark is describing in this text. We have heard plenty of examples where churches and other communities of faith have claimed to have exclusive rights, to have exclusive understanding, to know exclusive practices that are the only ways to live out faith as disciples of Christ. There are even some communities of faith that hold they have the exclusive naming rights to the term people of God. Just recently I understand that church not far from here put on their Facebook page that if people were not hearing the Word of God at this particular church, then people were not hearing the REAL Word of God.

Well, since we are not part of that particular church, I guess the only we can do is prayerfully ask God to extend God's grace to us. And in doing, invite God to fill us with God's wisdom and guidance so that we as ones who may not be hearing the REAL Word of God each and every week, can understand and be open to God's word for the rest of us other folk. Once again, please hear the sarcasm in my voice.

As I spent time with this text this past week, I couldn't help but be disturbed by it. My first thought after having read it was "Really, after two thousand some odd years, we as people of faith still haven't figured it out. Even now, today, we are still running to Jesus and saying, "That person is not one of us, so we stopped him from bringing healing and wholeness to others." Unfortunately, we are still allowing the primary phrase that we use to describe the Kingdom of God, to not be filled with love and grace but rather be filled accusations. It seems we as people of faith are constantly shouting at each other, "I'm telling Jesus on you!"

Unfortunately, after two thousand years, as people of faith, we still haven't figured out that "Not being one of us" is not an adequate enough guideline for determining if a person is a disciple of Christ or not.

I can't tell you how many times I have heard story after story, of churches who have told people that their baptism wasn't real, wasn't sufficient, wasn't good

enough all because that particular person wasn't baptized in their church. I can't tell you how many times I have heard story after story of churches who have after telling people this, have made, yes made the person get re-baptized just so, now in that particular church's mind, that person would be baptized correctly and sufficiently enough to save that person's soul.

I have had people come to me again and again and say how hurt they were because an act of faith done in full acceptance of Jesus as their Lord and Savior was deemed not good enough, was deemed not an acceptable enough sign of God's grace simply because that act of faith was not done in the (quote/unquote) "right church. I can't tell you how many times people have shared with me the gut-wrenching grief they have experienced because a sign of faithfulness either made by their parents or made by themselves was deemed lacking because that act of faith was held as not the (quote/unquote) "right" practice.

After two thousand years, unfortunately we as the Body of Christ here on earth have not figured out that the problem of distrust, the problem of brokenness, the problem of hurt hasn't been completely caused by folks outside of the church's walls. We as the Church, we as the Body of Christ, have played a large part to adding to this problem as well.

All because we have let our awareness of being God's Beloved go to our heads. We have let our awareness of being God's people create an elitism, create a sense of self-importance that over time has built barriers between us, causing more divisions, causing more hurt rather than building bridges which invited others to experience God's grace and God's love.

As people of faith, we have let an awareness of being claimed and named as God's own children turn into a claim that we have exclusive rights to the Kingdom of God. Is it any wonder people don't want anything to do with organized religion nowadays? We have only ourselves to blame.

Case in point: Since we just held this service a few weeks ago, I want to give you a little bit of background on our Community service of Hope and Peace. And I will tell you that this service which we all love, this service which brings the community together, the service that centers us in a vision that is larger than us individuals, almost wasn't. In 2011, in memory of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11, I felt that God had laid a vision upon my heart to create a service to bring us all together. I felt lead to create a service which would remind us that we are not called to respond to violence with violence but rather to respond with the bread and the cup, to respond with compassion and community. So I went to our Worship committee, told them my idea, to which they responded, great, sounds like a good idea. But we probably need to run it by the Board just because it is so different. I

was completely fine with this because well, I was asking our church to do something completely out of our comfort zone. So at our Board meeting, I shared the idea and it was received with an overwhelmingly positive response.

Okay great, I thought hard part over. I just need to run it by the other churches in town. I knew they would be up for it because well, we are used to worshipping together for community services.

So the Midway ministerial meeting comes up. I tell everyone my idea. It was received with silence. Wait you want us to worship together on a Sunday morning? Well, yes. The eleven o'clock hour on Sunday is probably the most segregated hour ever in our society. Wouldn't it be great to send a message that our community can and will come together regardless of different beliefs and practices and worship together, yes on a Sunday morning? Wouldn't it be great to come together and show everyone that what is important for us is that we trust in God's grace and love to guide us? Once again, this was met with silence.

Well, we have to go back to our churches and ask. I get it. I understand. I had to do the same thing.

So a month goes by and at our next meeting, I ask well, what did everyone say? Are we all in? This was received with a no by the group. Well, what's the concern? Offering. How are we supposed to collect our church offering that

morning? Well, we can assign each church a basket with their name on it.

Members can place their individual offerings in that basket. Done. Each church can still receive offering. How does that sound?

Silence... We need to go back and talk to our churches.

A month passes... I ask, well, what did everyone say? Are we all in? This time; I got a few yes but still a few no's. So I ask, what is preventing your churches from doing this? I don't want to pressure you, but if we can come together as one community, all the churches, that would be great. What can we do to help make the service more welcoming for your communities of faith?

Well, it's because you are having communion as part of it. We only hold communion a few times of year and there are certain things that have to be done so that communion is celebrated correctly. Okay, like what? I asked this because growing up as a disciple of Christ, I have been practicing communion for a long time and no time was communion done exactly same as before. Grape juice and bread have been used. Apple juice and goldfish crackers. Youth saying the words of Institution. Adults saying prayers. All of these different pieces were part of the practice of communion for me. So I wanted to know what exactly was needed to be done so that these churches would agree to come together as one Body of Christ. I was told that communion had to be led by an ordained minister of their tradition. It

also had to be blessed by elders of their tradition. And anyone who was not part of their tradition was not allowed to partake in the bread and the cup. But it didn't stop there. The conversation continued with...well, since we are on the subject, I'm not sure how comfortable our members would be with women preachers speaking God's Word. It just isn't done in our tradition.

I have to tell you I was not expecting this. I was expecting reasons like "Our members will not want to worship outside." Or "Our members won't leave their pews." I was expecting reasons like "It is just too different for us." Or "It is going to be too hot." I wasn't expecting practices like communion and women preaching to prevent us from coming together as one community in peace and hope.

In looking back on that moment, I can almost hear the words, "Jesus we saw someone healing in your name but he was not one of us so we stopped him." As many of you know, this was our 5<sup>th</sup> year for this community service of hope and peace. But still there are churches within our community who will not participate because we are not worshipping according to what they hold as the quote/unquote, "right" way.

And I'm here to tell you...they don't know what they are missing!

You see, not being one of us should never be what prevents the Kingdom of God from coming to fruition. Faith is not about competition. Faith is about

community. Being a Christian is not about who is right and who is wrong. Being a Christian is about community. Being a disciple of Christ is not about who is in and who is out. Being a disciple of Christ is about welcoming the least of these, seeing all as created in the image of God, and extending God's grace, extending God's love to all of God's creation.

As people of faith, we know we are claimed and named as God's own. It is okay that we profess that this makes us special. It is great that we understand that this marks us in a way. I'll even go as far as saying that it is okay that we hold this claim as God's beloved sets us apart. Yes, being claimed as God's Beloved makes us distinctive. But...but as we hear Jesus tell his disciples, this claim does not make us privileged. This claim does not make us better than all the others. Yes, Being a disciple of Christ sets us apart but not for privilege. It sets us apart for service. Let me say that again: Being a disciple of Christ sets us apart but not for privilege. It sets us apart for service to all of God's children. No longer are we accountable to just ourselves. As Beloved children of God, we are now accountable to God.

Because once we have experienced God's grace, experienced God's love, we are transformed. Transformed into becoming the people God created us to be, the people God calls us to be. God's grace, God's love opens our eyes to see that there is enough, enough love, enough grace, enough welcome to go around. Just

because we extend these things to others does not mean that there will not be enough for you or me. In fact, the opposite is true.

The more we share God's grace, the more we share God's love, the more there is to go around. "When we have more than we ever need, we build a bigger table, not a higher fence."

As the people of God, as the Body of Christ here on earth, we are called to practice the welcome of God's Kingdom without restrictions because that is how God welcomes us. We are called to share God's love without exclusions because that is how God loves us. We are called to give God's grace to all without requirements to achieve it because that is how God continues to share God's grace with us.

It is time for us to realize that "not being one of us" will never ever be an adequate enough guideline to determine whether or not someone is a disciple of Christ or not. If we really have to have something to do this, then only the quality of our own discipleship, only the way we share God's love and grace with all, only the way we extend God's welcome to all will be a sufficient enough guideline when it comes to determining who is or who is not a disciple of Christ. But guess what...determining this is not up to us. We don't get to say who is in and who is out. God does. And God has already decided all means all.

If we have any questions or doubts about this, we only have to look at what Jesus told his disciples. He says to them “Look first to yourselves and ask, How are you getting in the way of the Gospel?”

Maybe, just maybe if we let this question be our guide, be what determines the quality of our own discipleship, then maybe just maybe we can begin to understand that the Kingdom of God doesn't ask our permission, doesn't ask who we think is worthy or not before welcoming people. Maybe just maybe by focusing our attention on becoming the person God created us, the person God calls us to be, we will finally start living out the values of the Kingdom of God, values like love, grace and mercy. Maybe just maybe if we stop concerning ourselves with what others are doing and whether it is right or wrong. And start worrying about what we are doing to bring healing and wholeness to God's creation first, than maybe just maybe we will truly become disciples of Christ and quit tattle-telling to Jesus.

May we always embrace the good news that God has named us and claimed us. However, may we also understand that this is not as a sign of privilege but as a call to service. Amen.

