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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
September 30, 2018  
19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Numbers 11:16, 24-29, James 4:7-12

Hymns: 41; 446; 416; 644

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Mark 9:38-50

<sup>38</sup> Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us."

<sup>39</sup> But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. <sup>40</sup> For he who is not against us is on our side. <sup>41</sup> For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

<sup>42</sup> "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. <sup>43</sup> If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— <sup>44</sup> where  
'Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.'

<sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— <sup>46</sup> where  
'Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.'

<sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire— <sup>48</sup> where  
'Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.'

<sup>49</sup> “For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. <sup>50</sup> Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Warnings

Our lives are full of warnings. Maybe too many. Maybe we see so many warnings that we don't pay attention to them. Some are very important for example the warning that cigarettes cause cancer. I guess today we might group that one with the obvious as well, but the warning is still ignored by many to their peril. Some warnings are quite obvious for example the one on the windshield sunscreen that it must be removed before driving the car. Really? You have to print that one? Some warnings are there to protect us, like the sign warning of the curve ahead in the road. Others are to make us cautious that we don't harm something or someone else, like the pedestrian crossing warning signal. I guess it is part of human nature that so many of us are arrogant enough to believe that warnings don't apply to us; we are the exception. We won't get hurt or harm someone else. That arrogance is reinforced when we “get away with it.” Like I haven't died from smoking yet, or “nobody got hurt when I was speeding or rolled through that stop sign.” But once somebody dies then it's too late, and we claim, “It was an accident!” when in fact it was carelessness.

Ah, but if the warning came to us from the Lord then that would be different, wouldn't it? We know enough to pay attention to every warning from the Lord! Well, one would think that but ... Well, our text this morning is just such a message from the Lord Jesus. It is sent to us in love as He alone can and does love and care for us and our soul's salvation. He warns to --

**THEME: Beware of Endangering Blood-bought Souls.**

That is the first truth of which we must always be consciously aware: the people out in the world are souls that have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. It is the will of the Lord that they be saved. Jesus has a very special regard for the souls of His children, those who have been called to faith in His name. On more than one occasion Jesus placed a child in the midst of the disciples to teach them lessons concerning faith and discipleship. The souls of these little ones were precious to Jesus. However the lesson goes deeper than that. Jesus regards each and every one of us who believe as one of His little ones. On this occasion Jesus was presented with a report about a man who was performing miracles in Jesus' name. He was not one of the band of disciples so the disciples took exception with his activity and ordered the man to stop casting out evil spirits in the name of Jesus. John reported to Jesus what they had done. Jesus' response is a caution to –

### **I Beware of Condemning the Faith of Others.**

**Mark 9:39-41** But Jesus said, “Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. <sup>40</sup> For he who is not against us is on our side. <sup>41</sup> For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

We can see that the disciples may have had a concern for the name of Jesus, and what this unknown man might have been saying about Jesus. However it also appears that they had a concern that this man was encroaching on a privilege they considered theirs; they were to teach others about Jesus and perform miracles and cast out demons in Jesus' name. Any concern for Jesus' name was right and proper; any jealousy they might harbor in their hearts concerning the preaching of the gospel was not proper.

We need to be careful here that we do not interpret this saying of Jesus as a lack of concern for doctrine. Jesus makes it abundantly clear time and again from the beginning of His public ministry to the day of His ascension that He cares a great deal about doctrine, about every teaching of Holy Scripture. Jesus' response to John's report of action was an acknowledgement that there are others who present the gospel, and back then even did signs and wonders in

Jesus' name that were bringing others to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. It wasn't the disciples' responsibility to stop them. Indeed Jesus went on to assure the disciples that those who did such works those who were not against them, were then on their side. Jesus also said that whoever shows a kindness in the name of the Lord, to the glory of Jesus' name will not lose his reward. Jesus' takes note of what is going on in this world in His name.

On the other hand we need to be careful not to do something that will cause others to lose faith. So, how does this apply to us today? Of course we must have concerns about the false teaching that is apparent in other church bodies. It is right and proper that we "*beware of false prophets*" (Matthew 7:15) as Jesus warned us, and understand that false teaching will eventually permeate all of the truth once it is tolerated. At the same time there are many different Christian churches that present the cross of Christ as the way to heaven, and continue to call sinners to repentance. We are not called to interfere with their ministries. They are answerable to the Lord. He will reward them for the good that they do. He will call them to account for any false doctrine they promote. Our interference could cause blood-bought souls to stumble in their faith.

So while we may not be able to join with them because we are instructed to avoid the teachers of false doctrine, (Romans 16:17) neither will we seek to undermine them as they work in the advancing the name of the Jesus. The souls under their care are under **their** care, not ours.

Jesus builds on this thought cautioning us to --

## **II. Beware of Causing Others to Stumble in their Faith.**

**Mark 9:42** "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea."

If there is any doubt about how serious Jesus is when it comes to leading others down the wrong path in faith and life, these powerful words of Jesus should dismiss that doubt. No one should think for a moment that those who undermine the gospel either in their teaching or in the defense of sin, or by their own sinful

behavior aren't inciting the wrath and condemnation of God. Remember, **Jesus calls sinners to repentance.** *"The Lord ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance,"* (2 Peter 3:9) His desire is for all *"to come to the knowledge of the truth."* (1 Timothy 2:4) Jesus, in the greatness of His love for lost and condemned sinners, sinners like us, came down to earth to bear our sin and endured the cross, and died for us that we might be redeemed to God. That propitiating sacrifice was not for the sins of a few, but for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2) God loved the world. By the power of the Spirit working through that gospel message sinners have been called to faith in His name, to find their righteousness and hope of everlasting life in Him.

It is easy for us to point the finger at others for their faults and how the teachings or the manner of life of others might lead one of Jesus' "little ones" to fall into sin, and even lose their faith. There are many rationalizations for sin used to minimize its seriousness but few work better for the devil than to hold up the sin of another child of God as an example to follow in the wrong direction. That directs our attention to **ourselves** and **our** lives, **our** choices, **our** words.

The Apostle Paul echoed the Savior's warnings in his first epistle to the Christians in Corinth:

**1 Corinthians 8:9-13** "Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. <sup>10</sup> For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? <sup>11</sup> And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? <sup>12</sup> But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Paul was able to point out a very specific behaviors among the Corinthian Christians, actions of Christians otherwise strong in their faith that could cause another Christian to fall from faith. And that is a significant point for us to bear in mind. In Corinth most of the meat offered for sale in the market had been part of sacrifice to an idol. That really bothered some of the more sensitive Christians.

However other Christians understood that idols weren't real, and they were not honoring the idol when they bought meat and took it home and ate it. Their choice could and did influence the behavior of those more sensitive Christians who then bought the meat and were sick at heart because they were convinced that they had served the idol, and had denied the Lord who bought them. Some were convinced they had lost salvation, and so they did! The lesson for us is clear: if you wound a weak conscience you sin against Christ. If you behave in a manner that leads others into sin, that leads others to fall from faith, even if it is by doing something that is as perfectly OK as eating meat, and by that choice you cause a weak brother to perish, was it worth it? Is it worth it to prove you have the liberty to drink alcohol if in a given situation it causes a brother to fall into sin? And what if it is something that is not a matter of Christian liberty? What if by a poor choice to enter sin ourselves we entice a weak brother to fall into sin? Jesus would have us consider carefully the consequence of our choices in life, that we consider our brother before our own liberty, and of course avoid sin. Remember both sides of this: that other person is a blood-bought soul, purchased by the holy precious blood of Christ, even as you and I have been. The consequences Jesus spells out in our text for those who cause another child of God to perish eternally should impress upon us exactly how serious Jesus regards this matter. Still, it happens. God forbid it happens in my life, but it can and probably has. We need to pray God to forgive our faults unknown even to us, if in my weakness I have misled a brother. Know assuredly God will forgive.

Now, let us consider Jesus' cautionary words for our own lives.

### **III. Beware of Tripping Yourself to Fall from Faith.**

Yes, Jesus uses some extreme examples in our text: if your hand or your foot or your eye cause you to sin, cut them off, pluck out your eye. It would be better to go to heaven missing that part of your body than to be lost eternally possessing them. Some might ask, "Is Jesus serious?" He was deadly serious that we should be prepared to take drastic action to protect our faith. But the fact is neither your hand nor your foot, or for that matter your eye lead you into sin. It comes out of the heart, from our sinful nature, what Scripture calls our old adam that sin proceeds and finds its way

into our lives. However, there are circumstances in life, activities we might enjoy, friends we like to spend time with that lead us the wrong way, away from the Lord, and down the broad and easy path that leads to destruction. And yes, some of these activities might be fine for one of our fellow Christians but undermine our faith, leading us into sinful desires and behavior. Those are the things that we must cut off. We need to realize that whatever it might be that we regard as so precious to us in this life, if it destroys our faith in Jesus, if it leads to eternal perdition, it just isn't worth it. Jesus sets before us a picture of hell that is horrifying. We don't want to "be cast into hell fire—<sup>48</sup> where 'Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.'"

But we are aware of our weakness and the sin that allures us so often overwhelms us. What shall we do? We exclaim with the Apostle Paulk: "*Who shall deliver me from this body of death?*" (Romans 7:24) Jesus' closing words are presented for our assurance of faith as we endure the trials and tribulations and temptations in this life.

**Mark 9:49-50** "For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. <sup>50</sup> Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."

We are told that all things work together for good for those who love God in Romans 8:28. Peter in his first epistle also reminds us that our faith will be tested and thereby purified. The tribulations and trials of this life focus our hopes on the Lord. The gospel of God's love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus preserves us in faith not only in the face of temptation but in the face of sin. As we cling to the cross of Christ and hear that gospel of God's love and forgiveness time and again, not only Sunday after Sunday but day after day, we will have that preserving salt of the gospel stored upon in our hearts and minds, and the Holy Spirit shall preserve us unto eternal life. This is critical not only for ourselves but also for our loved ones who surround us. This includes our dear brothers and sisters in Christ. As the peace of Christ enriches our hearts we shall also have peace with one another and strengthen one another unto eternal life.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.