

## **Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 29, 2024**

Introduction to themes for the day and for the season-

Today is the National Day of truth and reconciliation and the history of residential schools convicts us of Jesus' warning about careless treatment of those he calls the little ones. We continue to remember Gospels were written to and for communities. Sometimes the word to the church is hard to hear and hard to bear. Yet even when Jesus' words seem most harsh, he's calling us to love God and neighbour.

Prayer of the Day

Generous God, your Son gave his life that we might come to peace with you. Give us a share of your Spirit, and in all we do empower us to bear the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen

Gospel

### **Mark 9:38-50**

38John said to him, "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."

## Sermon

The scene hasn't changed and evidently Jesus is still holding the child he's blessed in his arms. Jesus has already called out John's competitive streak...one John shares with his companions...Jesus' words about welcoming are barely out of his mouth when John carps at the good others are doing because they aren't in his camp.

We're not here to throw shade at John. As folk in recovery groups say, we need to take our own inventory and not somebody else's—the church has something to learn from John. The church has much to answer for both in our history and present day. Just how many examples would support such a claim? I have more than enough and as the super-hero says, "I can do this all day". Just for starters....

Martin Luther was notoriously anti-semitic and his views were co-opted centuries later by the Nazis and the architects of the holocaust. Martin Luther also sided with the nobility against the peasants who clamoured for food...tens of thousand of peasants were killed.

Spanish inquisition. Crusades. Salem witch trials. Apartheid in South Africa. Genocide in North America. Anglican and Lutheran churches have repudiated past teachings that led to the horrors that happened in residential schools—doing harm and not protecting the vulnerable decades ago will haunt this generation and ones to come.

Some of us have family histories involving being hurt by the church and churches. LGBTQ kids are shamed and condemned. People of colour hear white nationalism preached from some pulpits. Immigrants from Haiti who were part of churches in Springfield Ohio are staying home fearing for their safety while 'religiously inclined' political candidates spread lies and fear about them.

Bible scholars say that the disciples portrayed in the Gospels are a stand in for all who follow Christ—and in our time that means the institutional church. So when we tut-tut about John's clueless ambition even as Jesus is teaching, we need to look in the mirror and ask ourselves how the church in this moment is a stumbling block for some. Then we need to ask—what form will our repentance take?

(Rev. Dr. Philip Ruge-Jones: Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church Eau Claire WI-Writer and performer of Mark's Gospel-by heart)