
The story is told of two shopkeepers who were bitter rivals. Their stores were directly across the street from each other, and they would spend each day keeping track of each other's business. If one got a customer, he would smile triumphantly at his rival. One night, an angel appeared to one of the shopkeepers in a dream and said, "I will give you anything you ask, but whatever you receive, your competitor will receive twice as much. Would you be rich? You can be very rich, but he will be twice as wealthy. Do you wish to live a long and healthy life? You can, but his life will be longer and healthier. What is your desire?" The man frowned, thought for a moment, and then said, "Here is my request: Strike me blind in one eye!"

Jealousy isn't pretty is it? But we've all experienced it, that fear that something, or someone that we believe belongs to us might be taken away. It might be someone, some acclaim, or some credit, that we believe to be ours, but is going to someone else. We want what we believe to be rightfully ours. No one else should have it.

One of the themes we see in our texts this morning is jealousy. First in the OT reading, and in Gospel. In our OT text this morning in Numbers 11 we read about Israel in their 40 years of wandering trying to figure out how to govern themselves. 27 . . . a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, stop them!" 29 But Moses said to him, "**Are you jealous for my sake?** Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!"

Joshua wants the acclaim, his own glorification. . . He can't tolerate someone else getting credit.

However, the work of the Lord was bigger than what Joshua thought it was. He thought that his group, his gang, his tribe, were the only ones who had the truth, that they alone spoke for God.

Moses would have none of it.

Moses says, your vision of God's work is too small. You don't see the big picture. You need to remain open to the the movement of the Sprit, open to the work of the kingdom.

We see the same jealousy in the Gospel today in the disciples who are concerned that others are doing God's work in God's name,
are not the right kind of people,
Mainly because they are not one of us. . . say the disciples.

Remember in the previous chapter of Mark, the disciples tried to heal a boy, and they could not. Jesus had to step in.

Now, they are jealous of people casting out demons in Jesus name. Something they weren't able to do, and now they don't want anyone else doing it. They are closed off, protective, and fearful.

They want the acclaim. Their own glorfication. They can't tolerate someone else getting credit.

Jesus, on the other hand, has an inclusive attitude. He's open to new partnerships and relationships.

Jesus says, your vision of God's work is too small. You don't see the big picture. You need to remain open to the the movement of the Sprit, open to the work of the kingdom.

Before going further, we need to consider the nature of **demons**.

Demons can be spirits or malevolent beings, but they can also represent the embodiment of that which is not God. But there are "demons" that are "powers and principalities" that hurt and harm and are not the will of God for the world. What are the "demons" that plague us today? Here are a few examples:

- Addiction (130 people die every day from opiates or overdoses ¹)
- Racism
- Elitism
- Classism
- Sexism
- White Christian Nationalism

¹from [U.S. Health Resources & Service](#)

- Violent intolerance
- Partisan hatred

And then Jesus goes off, talking about hell.
But just what is “hell.”

A little background on hell–

One of valleys that falls away from Jerusalem is the Valley of Hinnom or *Gehenna* in Greek. In the Old Testament, that valley was known for Baal worship and the sacrifice of children to the god Molech. Later it became the town rubbish dump ~ where the bodies of criminals and dead animals were thrown into a smoldering stinking fire that slowly and continuously burned. In Judeo-Christian thought that place became associated with a conception of a place of *eternal* punishment for sinners.

But is hell the fiery place that the wicked go when they die? Or, might the “demons” I just named a kind of “hell” for those who are victims of injustice and oppression?

I like what Daniel Migliore thinks about Hell:

“Hell is simply to be oneself apart from God’s grace and in isolation from others. Hell is that self-chosen condition in which, in opposition to God’s agapic love and the call to a life of mutual friendship and service, individuals barricade themselves from others. It is the hellish weariness and boredom of a life focused entirely on itself. Hell is not an arbitrary divine punishment at the end of history. It is not the final retaliation of a vindictive deity. Hell is self-destructive resistance to the eternal love of God. It symbolizes the truth that the meaning and intention of life can be missed. Repentance is urgent. Our choices and actions are important. God ever seeks to lead us out of our hell of self-glorification and lovelessness, but neither in time nor in eternity is God’s love coercive.”²

Jesus uses hell as a fear tactic- surely hyperbolic - to be inclusive of the least of these and those who wish to follow Jesus.

But, **remember what set off this tirade from Jesus** - the disciples first arguing over who is greatest, then complaining about others taking the credit.

² Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, p. 347.

In the tirade, Jesus uses grotesque imagery, and surely it is imagery, don't you think?

A word on self-amputation:

This passage on cutting off offending body parts is the one place I think most if not all Christians agree that not ALL of the Bible should be taken literally. I mean, I know a lot of sincere God-fearing Jesus-loving Bible-believing Christians, and I don't know anyone that's cut off anything. What's more, if someone did cut off a body part, I don't think we'd think they were devout, even if they cited this passage. I think we'd all think they had severe mental illness. My cousin told me that during his residency, a man ended up in an emergency having tried to cut off a body part because of this verse. He was not mentally well.

So I think we can safely say Jesus was using hyperbole here—purposeful exaggeration to make a point—and not giving us a blueprint for faithful living.

And that point? Don't cause people to stumble, including yourself. ESPECIALLY don't cause “little ones” to stumble. The Greek here is *mikros*, and we aren't sure if this is referring to actual children or, perhaps, it may be referring to those young in belief in Christ. Isn't it the case that,

“Confronting the dullness of human hearts, Christ in Mark 9 amps up the volume. A cascade of unsettling images (millstones, severed limbs, gouged-out eyes, devouring worms and fire) conspire to wake the listeners from the stupor of sin into the dawning glory of God's Kingdom” (*Abingdon Preaching Annual*, 2018, p. 122)

Ronald Goetz put it this way:

It is ironic that the one who ended up mutilated for sin was Jesus himself. He who said cut off your hand and foot was hanged hand and foot from the cross. He who advised plucking out your eye shut both his eyes unto death. Perhaps Jesus has earned the right to discuss with us the gravity of our sin, having forgiven us our sin in such mutilating agony. Perhaps his forgiveness of us might evoke in us, if only for a moment, a willingness to wonder about the pride we take in our modernity, our self-sufficiency, our self-justification. Perhaps we do stand in need of grace. Could it be that if Jesus' cross is any indication, the only real grace is costly, hard-earned grace? Maybe we, even we, need as a mercy to hear of the awe-full judgment of God for a time. And

thereby to be brought to our senses about the significance of our lives and deaths.

* * *

Back to jealousy. . .

If I may use a contemporary word to summarize our scripture in Numbers and Mark, it seems Moses, and the new Moses—Jesus, are interested in *bipartisanship*.

Bipartisanship holds that the end goal is more important than who gets the credit, or who wins. . .

Partisan politics are about defeating and annihilating the other side, winning at all costs. The way of the kingdom is to work for the greater good, to work for the common good.

One commentator put it this way, I like it a lot:

*“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.**”³*

It’s the collaboration that we speak of frequently here at AHLC, which is a version of bipartisanship, a version of the inclusive world of God for the repair of the world.

Might we guard against jealousy, and join hands with all God’s people, to do the healing work of the kingdom.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

³ Sunday and Seasons.