

Sunday, September 30, 2018

Esther 7: 1-6, 9-10, 9:20-22

James 5:13-20

Mark 9:38-50

Removing the Stumbling Blocks

Have you ever had a day when everything seemed to be blocked or there were so many detours you were not sure what was going to happen next? What did you do to cope? How did it turn out in the end?

The mother got up and realized that the alarm had not gone off—it was 10 minutes later than the normal time to get everyone up, ready and out of the house. Now she had to push and nag and get everything done even faster! The coffee pot was not turned on the children were not moving out of their beds and into the bathroom. Then it seemed nobody wanted to eat breakfast or if they were sitting at the table it was with eyes half asleep. Things seemed to be in slow motion. Finally everyone was showered and dressed and ready to go. Then it was realized the lunches had not been packed-quickly to the kitchen and all was assembled. Then the children arrived at the sidewalk only to see the school bus pass by. Now they would need a ride to school. Everyone was in the car and mom was driving them to school when one of the kids said, don't take the faster route to school as it was under construction and the work crews would already dealing with backed up traffic. The mom was able to quickly change her route but came to a red light. She followed in behind a street sweeper and behind her was a city bus until the next block where the light was red again. Everyone was slowing down until the street sweeping truck pulled over. Pulling near the school the kids jumped out and walked the rest of the way but as they walked, they heard the bell ring just as they were making their way to the sidewalk. Now the mom had to get to work but just as she pulled out into traffic, she looked down at her feet and saw that she had her slippers on! Now she would have to go back home to get shoes. And so she turned around only to head towards the road construction near the school and sat there waiting to go and then of course at the corner the light was red!

Our reading from Mark 9 is one that is a difficult one for us to think that Jesus taught because of the violence within it. Jesus we can truly say did not like sin and told those listening harsh words – if you cause little one who believe in him to sin, it would

be better for that person to be drowned. Then he goes on to say—if you hand or foot caused you to sin—it is better to cut them off than to enter God's kingdom maimed then sinful. But then Jesus gets more descriptive—if your eye causes you to sin—take it out, because you do not want to be thrown into hell- where fires never go out. Jesus hated sin.

Yes this is Gouge-Your-Eye-Out Sunday if you've ever sinned which is a very pointed way to say- don't sin or if you do, cut off what causes you to sin; Jesus is serious about sin and to put it mildly he said sin was a wrong. To put it bluntly, he thought that it would be better for us to go through life without one or more appendages than to sin, And especially if we were to cause someone who believes in him to sin. Jesus hated sin. I also think it's safe to say that most and maybe all those who have read and studied this passage understand that Jesus was not expecting anyone to take it literally but to remove what causes you to fall away from the path of Jesus' teachings of life. Remove those stumbling blocks.

Many people try to eat healthy but then of course something happens to cause us to deviate from the good food we should enjoy regularly. Sometimes we call these temptations. It has been proven that if you have sweet treats—like cookies and candy hidden away and leave fruit either out on the counter or in the first shelf of the fridge one will eat the fruit first. Why? Because it takes more effort to get the hidden treats and by the time you find them, that sugar craving had faded. We may not think that having candy is sinful, but it can cause us to change paths to healthy food choices.

But what are the temptations we live with today? Gambling, risking money or assets one cannot afford to lose, drinking in excess, or smoking. But there are others. One only needs to hear the top news stories of the day- to hear of how people have been tempted to do something and are criticized if it turns out to be sinful. We even read that political leaders are not always honest or even skew information—is this sinful? How do we define sin?

We live in a culture where the concept of sin has become entangled in legalistic arguments over right and wrong. When many of us consider sins we think of violations of the Ten Commandments. Even then, we tend to think of murder and adultery as "major" sins compared with lying, cursing, or idolatry. But when we look at the original

sin of Adam and Eve, it was not one of these major sins but disobedience in eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. By disobeying God they missed the mark of perfection established by God and evidenced by Jesus. This original sin has led us all to sin. Paul says in Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." But we are not give up and say, Oh, well. I guess that's all in this life and do whatever sinful act we would like. Jesus says don't and if there are things- people- temptations- anything that might cause you to sin—get rid of it.

Jesus says this as a warning but then what he states next might cause us to wonder what he is referring to. "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how you can make it salty again?" Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other.

Salt is good. Jesus is calling those who follow him something worthy or of value. In the ancient world salt was a valuable and scarce commodity. It was used as currency in some countries even into modern times. During an invasion of Ethiopia, in the late 19th century, Italian soldiers found blocks of salt stored in bank vaults along with other familiar forms of currency. Jesus was paying his disciples a compliment when he called them salt. So when he said that they are salt it was a worthy compliment. The concerns Jesus raised however is if a person is sinful how might they also be like salt?

We are all sinners, it is the one thing we really have in common. "We read in I John 1:8-10 "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." But "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives".

The good news in all of this is that, once we recognize ourselves as sinners, we need only to repent and embrace Jesus to be forgiven. And we can help others to choose the right path to Jesus. Because it is Jesus who can forgive because he died and rose again in victory over death.

We are to help others not hinder them to coming to Jesus. We are the feet, hands and voice of Jesus today, Are we giving the proper directions to finding Jesus? Imagine yourself as a sign post at an intersection of the road. On one sign would be the way of Jesus and on the other is the way of sin. How many people see your sign and go

the wrong way? Your life is a sign post with a sign on it. Are you sending people down the wrong road or are you truly worth your weight in salt and all that is good and right in this world?

As we gather around the table of Jesus today let us give thanks for the many gifts we receive from God who created us. Let us give thanks that we are salty, and that we know that we will sin and yet also believe that if we come before God and confess our sins we are forgiven through Jesus Christ. As we share the bread and the juice this morning, we remember what Jesus did for us so that we are forgiven and set free to live again. And living means following his path of life. Sure there will be deterrents and temptations, but the stumbling blocks will be removed because we are Christ's faithful followers. Let us give thanks to God.

Let us pray.

Holy God we praise you for Jesus' teaching on sin and how we are to turn away and live His way. Help us O God to be the salt that Jesus called his disciples- faithful, worthy, caring and willing to tell others of the good news of Jesus. Prepare our hearts O God as we share what Jesus asked us to do in remembrance of Him. SILENCE> Amen.