

Have Salt in Yourselves

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost) is Mark 9:38-50. This text again has two narratives. Verses 39-41 have to do with John reporting on someone casting out demons and wanting to have him stopped. But Jesus tells John not stop the man because this person is doing a mighty work. Jesus makes an interesting statement in verse 41 when he says: "*For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.*" This explanation cites that no deed, no matter how insignificant, done "on the ground that you are Christ's" will always be rewarded. That is the attitude they should have toward such as are mentioned in verses 38-39, not an attitude of exclusion.

Verses 42-50 tell of Jesus warning concerning being responsible for causing others to fall into sin. It is a very powerful warning with grave consequences.

"*Little ones*" here might be the little children mentioned in vv. 36–37. It can also mean to cause even those whom we might consider to be the least of believers to sin will bring serious judgment. (CSB)

"*Millstone*" was a heavy stone slab turned by a donkey in grinding grain. It was obviously very large and when hung around one's neck would be certain to plunge them to the bottom of any body of water.

When Jesus talks about cutting of hand, foot and plucking out an eye he does not mean physical mutilation because we can still sin greatly even if we lose these body parts. Jesus is using hyperbole, a figure of speech that exaggerates to make its point, it is used here to emphasize the need for drastic action. Often sin can be conquered only by radical "spiritual surgery."

Jesus doesn't end on a note of threatening but gives his audience something positive to which to strive. He says "*have salt in yourselves.*" That is to say be purified (v. 49) become "the salt of the earth" (Mt 5:13). Without salt there can be no seasoning. Without the Word and Spirit there can be no forgiveness, no battle against sin, no everlasting life. This will bring peace to our souls.

Prayer: Lord, give us the lasting faith that can persevere through every trial. Empty our hands of anything that competes with you, and let us hold firmly to you eternally. Amen. (TLSB)