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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, September 30, 2018
19th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 26/Proper 21/Year B
Primary Text: Mark 9:38-50
Sermon Title: “The Seven Faith Practices - Invite”

Theme

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus teaches his disciples about ministry that involves service and sacrifice. His disciples are slow to realize that these words apply to them as well as to others.

Text

³⁸John said to [Jesus,] “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

Do you want to know how *not* to do evangelism? The disciples are a case study in how not to do evangelism! Get this, there is someone out there who is not one of the Twelve who is casting out demons in Jesus' name! Yep, that's the problem according to John.

Let me break it down for you. There is a guy out there, who happens not to be one of the Twelve, who is, never the less, curing people of mental illness. My guess is that he encountered Jesus somewhere and was converted (whatever that means at this place in time) and has figured out that 1) if he has faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ, and 2) as he prays for healing for whomever, he prays for in Jesus' name – the healing actually takes place!

Now let me ask you a question. If I did that once and it worked, do you think I would do it again? You bet I would! And that is exactly what was happening. Someone has tapped into the magic formula: Faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ and praying for something that is already in line with the will of God in Jesus' name – and that is the problem!

Jesus said, "Stop the train!" Actually he did not say that. Trains were not invented until the early 19th century, but Jesus was astonished! "You mean someone has actually done what I taught? And you, my "Twelve", my authentic "disciples" are trying to stop him? No! Let him go with my blessings!"

And at the conclusion of this passage Jesus used the metaphor of salt to describe the role of the disciple. And I think it works. Salt adds flavor to food, and in the same way, disciples of Jesus Christ are to add, what, flavor? Vitality? Wholeness? To the life of those they encounter who seek a deeper relationship with God. If they, his authentic Twelve, have lost that flavor, then they are no good to him. And if someone else has caught it, then good for them and good for the kingdom!

Welcome to week 4 of the seven part series on the Seven Faith Practices. The seven faith practices are seven verbs, seven action words that define the life of the disciple of Jesus Christ. The seven faith practices are those seven verbs, seven action words, displayed behind me on those brightly colored banners. As I've said, the disciple doesn't get the option of picking and choosing which of the seven to

engage. All are equally important, but it is natural for a person to find one or more that fits and feels better on them.

Today we are talking about the Faith Practice of Invite. Invite is the cleverly disguised name for what the church used to call evangelism. At the little church up north we called it, Faith Sharing Ministry.

In a moment Bill Wilson will join me to dialogue about what opportunities your Church offers to encourage the Faith Practice of Invite.

The experience of God's loving touch in one's life is a gift the maturing disciple feels compelled to share with others. One way our faith becomes active is when we put into words what God has done for us. Words of witness and acts of genuine hospitality directed toward our friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors create the opportunity through which the Holy Spirit brings others into a relationship with Christ and his church.

The biblical model of evangelism is relational: friends bring friends to Jesus. "Come and see" are the operative words and find frequent expression in the Gospels, the story of the early church, and in the tradition of the church over the centuries. The disciple plants seeds and invites; the Holy Spirit works the miracle of faith and conversion. Part of a disciple's job description is to invite others often.

The fact is, in an ever-more complicated culture, the church and its Gospel of Jesus Christ has a message that saves, heals, forgives, and restores. Where else can a person go to hear that message and receive God's grace? And together, we are God's agents of grace.

Sharing one's faith involves conversations with friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors about the presence and importance of Christ in our lives. Sharing faith means living in such a way that our lifestyle, actions, and words reflect the one whose name we bear: "Christ-ians."

Now I would like to invite Bill Wilson up to share with us, how the Invite Table can help us with our invitational effort. Bill.

Now two weeks ago during the Encourage Table discussion, we handed out these slick bracelets and I asked you to wear them facing you so that you were encouraged whenever you looked at it. It is important that you be reminded and encouraged that “You belong here. We belong together.” Would you repeat that after me, “You belong here.” “We belong together.”

Then last week during the Serve Table discussion, I asked you to take that bracelet off and turn it around toward the other that you may be serving so that they can see it. I pray that others will indeed see it, and ask you about it, and that will be all the opportunity you need to tell them about what compels you to serve in Christ’s name. And maybe just maybe, that will present you with the opportunity to tell someone else that they too are created by the one Heavenly Father and creator of all. And that little bracelet will remind you to tell them as a fellow creation of the God you worship that “You belong here. We belong together.” Would you repeat that after me. “You belong here.” “We belong together.”

Well don’t you know, we were given 1000 of those bracelets and we are averaging less than 300 in worship, so that means that there is enough for each of you to take 3, and that is exactly what I want you to do. This week, I would like you to wear the one you already have on your wrist facing the other, and carry another in your pocket, and when someone asks you about it, tell them what you know, that we are creations of the one Heavenly Father, and therefore “You belong here. We belong together.” Would you repeat that after me. “You belong here.” “We belong together.”

See how easy that is? Imagine if we all do what I feel the Holy Spirit is telling us, and within a week or two there are some 600 of these bracelets out there, on people who have been given an invitation to experience the Good News of Jesus Christ through us. An invitation to be a part of something that brings salvation, healing, forgiveness, and restoration. Oh what a glorious thing that would be.

So as you leave today, there will be a box of these bracelets for you to take with you, so that you can be a part of the Invite Table. Do you like that Bill? Amen.