

Children's sermon (cup)

(Everybody) has enemies. It's true! Everybody has someone they deem as not like them; who seek to undo them; who are persona non grata, person without grace. Who are yours?

The world that has evolved around us seeks to declare those enemies are (close) at our gates, and those enemies seek to completely destroy us. Well, according to a few folks that's what's happening.

In reality (people) do the best they can to live out their days, provide for their families, and maybe even do something nice for someone in need.

The (dualist) view of the world is a deceiver. Dualism deems us to be right, enlightened, smart, best, and winners, while our "enemies" are (wrong), in the dark, foolish, worst, and losers. Does that make sense? Dualism is a simplistic, and lazy way of looking at the world in which we live. In truth, life is much more complex!

(Jesus) lived in a dualist world. There were clear delineations between who is right and who is wrong; who belongs and who doesn't belong; who is worthy of our acknowledgement and who is not.

The downside with dualism is the (very fact) that it is so easy. We are right. They are wrong. Period.

So, in the 9th chapter of Mark the (disciples) are all in a tizzy over the fact that they saw someone casting out an evil spirit from a person, in Jesus' name. "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus we saw someone casting out an evil spirit in your name! (But....) " You know every time there's a but, you know the result is not going to be good. But....we....stopped him. Really? Could be the saddest sentence in all of the Bible. We stopped him...doing good!

That's how (dualism) works. Despite the fact that this person was able to cast out an evil spirit....something the disciples, themselves, were unable to do a chapter ago....obviously, they were justified in their shutting him down. He isn't right...like....us!

This scene is an echo of a scene in the book of Numbers. (Moses) had had it up to here with the whining of the people, so he slams his resignation letter on God's desk. I'm done! This is ridiculous! I can't do this anymore! Just kill me now!!! Right wrong.....do you see it?

God tells Moses to (call 70) leaders, and have them gather at the tabernacle, the tent of worship. They do gather, and the Spirit of God falls upon them. But, out in the camp...Medad and Eldad....(the Lenny) and Squiggy of the Old Testament get a dose of that same spirit!!! Can you imagine? Lenny and Squiggy speaking the word of God among the people!!! Well, sure. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of God. BUT.....

Joshua wanted to stop them. Who do they think they are? Well, everybody knows its Lenny and Squiggy and they are speaking of mercy, and grace for sinners, and hope for the destitute, and comfort for those who grieve. As odd as Lenny and Squiggy might be.....isn't God able to empower who God chooses to bring the gift of mercy into this world?

James says the same thing. Instead of Lenny and Squiggy, or instead of the disciples....(you have) the power to pray for those who need your prayers! You have the ability within you to bring a word of peace to a fractured family or community. You have the ability to show compassion to anyone in need of help, of mercy, of hope.

As the book of James comes to an end, I encourage you to consider its very last words. Remember, (James) is the Popular Mechanics of the New Testament....and he began with a very practical guide to living this faith. Watch what you say, and how you say it. Do the works of goodness because God has shown you love and mercy. Be mindful of those in need and give without hesitation to those in need. Be gentle in spirit....and, whoever turns a sinner from the error of their ways will save him from death, and cover over a multitude of sins. Mercy. The final word of James is to show mercy freely and often.

You don't hear much mercy among the disciples do you? (Lord,) we made him stop casting out evil spirits because he....he....he....what? He is not on our team! I can just see Jesus shaking his head, while rolling his eyes and sighing....don't you guys get it?

If he was doing something good....for heaven's sake don't stop him. (Good) is good whether we do it or someone else does. We stand for the good of humankind, to show care and mercy for the broken of our world.

Even today, there are Christians who understand (their) holy calling by God to chop and hack away at what they consider sinful, leaving despair and destruction in their wake.

There are also Christians who understand (their) holy calling to go the way of the cup of cold water to a world thirsty for healing, for grace, and for generosity.

And in all truth both approaches share a common orthodoxy. Some look at the world fractured by suffering and hate, and the ax wielders set upon it to stamp out sin, leaving people who think like us, and look like us. We see it in the folks at Westboro Baptist Church, as well as the likes of ISIS and Al Qaeda....

If we follow (the way) of the cup of cold water.....responding to need with grace and generosity, to give life to others and in the process gives life to ourselves.

We've seen the results of ax wielding saints and sinners, (African)-American families hacked apart by mass incarceration, and economic injustices. In cities and states where funding for education and healthcare for the littlest, the least and the last are drying up...systematically cut off from the promise of the American dream under the guise of righteousness.

(Imagine) a cup of cold water among our poorest children and families. (Imagine) a cup of cold water for asylum seekers. (Imagine) a cup of cold water for homebound seniors, (for opioid)-addicted sons and daughters, (for the) unemployed and under-employed.

I remind you that you were welcomed into the Body of Christ (by a) cup of water poured upon your head in your baptism. (Jesus) asked for a cup of cool water from a Samaritan woman....and promised her the living water of grace and mercy and peace....given in Jesus....(who) shook his head at his disciple's decision....to stop a good work in a world in need of that very good work. Imagine....if you will....what could have been had axes been laid down....and cups of cold water given instead. Imagine.....if you will. Amen.

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