

October 4, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Morar Murray-Hayes



Reading: Mark 9:38-50

The Message: Resilience Against Evil

[Video](#)

Evil exists. How do we protect ourselves from it?
How do we protect those we love from it?

There is much that is ugly and evil in the world. What keeps us whole when so much of life seems bent on breaking us? Only our relationship with God. God's love and our response to that love make us whole and holy.

There are too many examples of people in our world who are separated from God by their actions.

Disciple John says to Jesus, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.'

The disciples object to someone beyond their circle casting out demons, ignoring those who need healing.

They themselves were not successful in doing this themselves. They tried to cast out a demon from a boy, but were unable to do so because they forgot one little detail: they forgot to pray first.

How could they forget such an important activity, one that acknowledges the source of healing power?

It may be that they were each trying to outdo one another in demonstrating their skills as exorcists and praying just slipped their minds. We can't be sure.

We do know that after this incident they quickly become embroiled in an argument over who is the greatest among them.

Were they unable to do a good thing for someone else because they were preoccupied with their own power and forgot to call upon the power of God?

Did their self-centered desire for power get in the way of God's desire that evil be overcome and that healing take place?

It has never occurred to me in previous readings of this text just how bad John's comment to Jesus sounds. "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not with us." It's as if he is saying, "Well, if we couldn't do it, we're hardly going to stand by and let somebody else who isn't even a disciple do it!"

The disciples have taken a step beyond preventing their own ministry. They have progressed to preventing the ministry of someone else.

But Jesus cautions them: Don't worry about others, worry about yourself.

Jesus wants to emphasize just how much damage our wrong desires can do.

“better to be lame than to have two feet and be thrown into hell” -- a forceful image to convince us how seriously Jesus takes this.

He is trying to drive home just how harmful our self interest and forgetting to pray can be to others, as well as to ourselves.

Jesus challenges us to rewind our lives and pause at scenes in which we forgot to pray and wondered why we felt no sense of power and purpose, scenes in which we stood by with a sour look on our faces as someone else succeeded where we failed, scenes where we congratulated ourselves on our superiority to those around us.

Being avenues for the healing presence and power of Christ is the point. Anything that impedes that gift needs to go.

Jesus said,

‘Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me.

And it’s pretty simple: remembering to pray, noticing the holy instead of our own desires. Then, evil has less power over us.

And that’s what we need to teach our children; help them to notice the presence of God in their lives.

It’s simple. Let’s welcome Jesus into our lives, remember to pray, and encourage the work of Christ in the lives of others.