

Introductory

The first exchange recorded here (38-41), where John tells Jesus that they saw a man casting out demons in His name, and that they forbade him, has a parallel in Luke 9:49-50. The sermon on the little children (42-50) is very similar to the sermon in Matthew 18:5-9. When Mark quotes Jesus talking about salt (vv. 49-50), it sounds a lot like Jesus talking about salt in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:13-14).

As for using a metaphor or another figure of speech or a particular phrase more than once, if the metaphor or other thing is good and appropriate, then of course a preacher may use it more than once, like Jesus does with the “salt” metaphor. After three years here, some of the regular attenders could probably quote some things from sermons, things that I’ve said several times, and that’s a good thing.

As mentioned last week, Matthew 18:1-11 is the reading for St. Michael in the TLH one-year lectionary. In LW, this text from Mark is appointed to be read on Pentecost 19B. LSB has Matthew 18:1-20 as the reading for Proper 18A. The disciples of Jesus continue to look bad, and children continue to look good in comparison. You sense a certain chippiness on their part towards Jesus; they are thinking very highly of themselves, and are borderline disrespectful with Jesus.

Recall how last week, while Jesus was talking, they were talking among themselves, and when He asked them what they were talking about, they would not tell Him. He took them into the house and He sat down, assuming the position of teacher, but He had to call them over to be taught. Today we find John telling Jesus that they had run into some other Christians, and that one of those Christians was casting out demons, which is a good thing, and John took it upon himself to tell the guy to stop it.

Another continuing theme from last week is that these men want to talk about silly things, like who among them is greater, and forbidding other Christians from doing good works, and Jesus wants to talk about Christian children. Last week, He took a child and used it as an object lesson for the “greater” Christian, and this week He warns against harming the spiritual life of even one of them.

In the next chapter (vv. 13-16), we will see Him blessing the children, over the objections of the adults, who told their parents to go away. That will be a part of our reading for next week, as we continue our emphasis on the place of adults and children in the Christian religion, so save your Anti-Anabaptist material for then.

Textual Notes

38. The verb that begins this sentence, “φημί,” is almost always used in the NT to refer to somebody responding to what has just been said, and in many cases the word is used to introduce a person’s answer to another person’s direct question. Last week’s pericope indeed flows into this week, and John is responding to what Jesus has just said – where we left off last week – Jesus’ discourse about greatness and children.

John responded, and what he – the disciple who Jesus loved – says in response to what Jesus had just said seems just a bit odd, doesn’t it? Speaking directly to Jesus, John says to the teacher, “εἶδομέν τινα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου ἐκβάλλοντα δαιμόνια, ὃς οὐκ ἀκολουθεῖ ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐκωλύομεν αὐτόν, ὅτι οὐκ ἠκολούθει ἡμῖν – we saw somebody, in your name, casting out demons, and we forbade him, because he does not follow us.” John makes it a point to tell Jesus that this unnamed man (“τινα” is a masculine pronoun) was doing this “in Your name.”

He seems to be complaining that this unnamed man usurping their own apostolic authority. Only the Twelve were the ones, he is saying, who can do things like that “in Your name.” Indeed, they *had* been given the authority to cast out demons, and they had in fact done just that, and we note that two weeks ago, in the case of the boy with the demon problem, they were *unable* to cast out that demon, and Jesus had done the casting.

When they asked Him, in private, why they had been unable to cast, He told them that it was because they had neglected to ask, perhaps thinking that they alone had that power, maybe even forgetting from whence that power came. What John seems to be doing here is reasserting the apostolic authority of the Twelve, reminding Jesus that the casting out of demons is in their bailiwick, and not in the bailiwick of that unnamed man and his ilk.

We have spoken here before about how the authority to do miracles was limited, and that the authority to do miracles died out in about the early second century. Not so the authority and ability to do exorcism; to cast out demons. As a matter of fact, the authority to cast out demons has always been given to the Church through the ages, and is given to us today.

I was watching Euronews last Saturday on Public TV, and they ran a story about priests in Spain doing exorcisms. With the decline of the Christian religion, demonic activity is on the rise, and the priests there are kept very busy exorcising them, all the while being criticized by the increasingly anti-Christian masses. As for the Lutherans, demons and exorcisms are things that we believe, but we don’t talk much about.

Everything is available on the Internet, except for *Lutheran Ritual for Exorcism*. But it’s widely quoted at www.conservapedia.com/Exorcism and you can read a very nice, very thorough article about that and Holy Baptism, written by no less than a Lutheran deaconess at www.strasbourg-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Baptismal-Liturgies-in-Lutheran-History.pdf

And if you want to read about specific demonic activity these days, read *And She Was a Christian* (NPH) by Pr. Peter Preus. He talks about his late wife Jean's suicide on September 3, 1994. Her death was caused by many things, he says, one of which is demonic activity. CPH seldom publishes books that are actually useful.

At any rate, the Twelve “ἐκωλύομεν – were forbidding,” an imperfect form of κωλύω, a verb that means that they kept trying to get the man to stop doing what he was doing, to cease and desist. Looking at the other occurrences of the word in the NT, their efforts to forbid were mostly verbal, and there may have been some passive physical brawn brought to bear, but nobody was punching anybody.

John's reasoning for their actions is “ὅτι οὐκ ἠκολούθει ἡμῖν – because he is not following (imperfect tense) us.” Since he is casting the demons out in the name of Jesus, it seems reasonable to conclude that the man *is* following Jesus, so the complaint must be that the man is not “following” the Twelve. That they see as problematic, and so they tell the man to stop it. They expect Jesus to concur.

39. But Jesus does not concur. Far from it, He uses the adverb “Μή” followed by the present imperative form of the verb “κωλύω” to tell them to stop doing what you are doing; stop forbidding them. He then points out that “οὐδεὶς γάρ ἐστιν ὃς ποιήσει δύναμιν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου καὶ δυνήσεται ταχὺ κακολογῆσαί με – there is nobody who will do a work of power in my name, who will be able quickly to speak evil of me.”

To be sure, there were many who spoke evil of Jesus with no hesitation, but somebody who is using the name and the power of Jesus to cast out demons will not be among them. But more to the point, as we are about to see, the ability to do miracles is not given in a vacuum. Such power is given only to Christians to people who will almost by definition be saying good things, not bad things about Jesus.

So exactly, who was this unnamed man? These twelve men have been given that power, and have used it, and have failed at least once, on account of their own arrogance. The power given to them was also specifically given to the seventy who are “appointed and sent out – ἀπέστειλεν” by Jesus two by two, as recorded in Luke 10, and when they return, they marvel that, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name.”

We note here that these seventy, in contrast to the twelve, at least the way they're acting here, seem to know their place, and they are staying in their lane. Greek scholars will note that the Greek word here quoted “sent” is a form of the verb “ἀποστέλλω,” and that the Eastern Church may well be correct when they call these seventy men Apostles.

Just because the Seventy get a lot less ink – twenty-four verses in Luke, no other mention in the NT – than the Twelve, does that make them lesser Apostles? Probably. But they still had the power to cast out demons, as did perhaps and presumably others as well, and when one of them used that power to do a good thing, it caused the Twelve to be miffed.

40. The familiar, “ὅς γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν καθ’ ἡμῶν, ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐστὶν – whoever is not against us is for us,” should never be explained by using American denominationalism, i.e. it’s not that one of the groups was orthodox Lutheran and the other group was Southern Baptist. They were all orthodox Lutherans who were not heretical, and who maybe were too quick to think that somebody was treading on their turf, and who moved to protect that turf, an ecclesiastical phenomenon with which Missouri Synod people are familiar.

Another possibility is that the casting man was one of the disciples of John the Baptizer. We know that John had disciples, and we know that certain of them later became disciples of Jesus, and we know that John told them to do that, but we don’t know that they all did. We also know that John and Jesus were joined at the hip, and that’s pretty much what Jesus is saying here to the Twelve.

41. In response to John’s complaint about one of the Seventy – or somebody – treading on the turf of the Twelve, He talks about a cup of water, saying that whoever gives to you a cup of water “ἐν ὀνόματι ὅτι Χριστοῦ ἐστέ – because in the name of Christ you are,” that’s a good thing. Note the use of the word “name” and that one finds his being either “in the name of Christ” or not.

John talks a lot about “the way,” and when I went to the Gospel of John class in August, Dr. Weinrich began by talking about how Christians are baptized into something, and that something is “the Way,” the Christian life, following Jesus into death, following Jesus also into life. That’s into what we are Baptized when we “are in the name of Christ.” They are “in the name of Christ” and should be happy about that.

42. But what He really wants to talk about is the children. They are still in the house, He is still teaching, He had taken that child and made it the center of attention, and He had been interrupted by John’s pronouncement and complaint of others casting out demons. But Jesus wants to talk about the children, and He gives this warning to the adults about the children; do not be the cause of any of these children losing their faith, because if you cause any of these children to lose their faith, it will not go well for you at the Judgment.

We note about whom He now talks, “little ones who believe – τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων.” Some manuscripts add “in me.” In preaching or teaching, point out the word “micros,” and talk about the Remington Micro Screen Razor, the Microwave oven, or maybe the Micro Brewery. It will make the meaning of the word more vivid in the mind of the hearer, and in addition, the next time the hearer microwaves her burrito, or shaves, or goes for a brew, he may think of the sermon.

The Greek word has come down to us intact; it means a very small thing. We are talking here about very small children, and they are Christian children. The adults are warned not to anything that “may cause even one of them σκανδαλίσῃ;” to turn away from their Christianity. The verb is “σκανδαλίζω,” and we’ve talked about that word before, but

there are always new people, and translations that render that word “offend” or something like that don’t quite communicate the seriousness of this hypothetical.

The word means “to snare in a trap,” like Satan is always trying to snare Christians in his trap, and like the wicked witch in the story, he especially likes little children, and sees each and every one of them as either Hansel or Gretel. Here Jesus has in mind anyone who assists Satan in any way in this endeavor, by actively encouraging Christian children to abandon the Faith, or by passively withholding Word and Sacrament from them.

Go ahead and cause your hearer to feel what it must feel like to have a mill stone tied around your neck and then tossed into the water, like when bad guy Wyatt Mathewson, wearing a cinder block necklace, is shoved off the pier by Alexander Mahone in Season Four of *Prison Break*. I was glad to see Mathewson go, but I could not help but feel what it must feel like to die that way, and it was not a good feeling. They say that Mahone had a lot of demons...

Good art, and good preaching, makes us feel things doesn’t it? Aristotle and we call that; creating pathos in the hearer. We ought to create pathos in the hearer. That doesn’t mean that it’s all about feelings – we also engage the mind – but it does mean that emotion is given to man by God, and we all feel things all the time, and that emotion connects with us and often helps us better to understand things.

43. Poking all kinds of holes in the “once saved, always saved” theory, a thing that is actually taught by many and believed by some, Jesus continues on with another hypothetical, that these men, who are Christian, may also be ensnared by Satan and abandon the Faith. Using the same conditional language that He used in the previous verse, He talks about the hand, and will talk about the foot, and will talk about the eye as possible avenues for Satan to do what he does. He begins here with the hand.

You have heard it said to men of old, “Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop.” And I say to you that whoever made that up knew what he was talking about. Without being too graphic, think of all the things that Satan can encourage you to do with your hands that are not what the hands are made for, and they are bad things; sin. Running down the list of the Ten Commandments, several of them are hard, if not impossible to break without using one’s hand or hands.

Jesus does not want people to be cutting off their hands. He just wants you to use those things that are among His best creation to do good things, not bad. He is appealing to the reasonable, thinking human, the one with a brain, by using a very basic, short “if – then” syllogism. *If* your hand is going to keep you out of heaven, and get you into hell, which last forever, *then* it’s better to remove that hand, which you would miss only until you die. That is very understandable, and no reasonable person would disagree with it.

The thing about logic and syllogism is that each of the theses – statements or ideas – expressed have to be true, and none of them can be false, and one false thesis can lead to a false conclusion. The fly in the ointment here would be the person who does not

believe one or more of the theses to be true. We might say of that person that the person is not a believer.

The believing Christian, on the other hand, would reasonably conclude that I would rather keep both of my hands *and* go to heaven, and so I had better get my hands under control and keep them under control. This is the Law, and the Law always convicts, even when the dictates of the Law are seemingly impossible to obey. Preach the Law in its fullness, and the Gospel also.

He speaks very clearly and unambiguously about “γέενναν – Hell” a Hebrew word with an etymology that we’ll be talking about in the next verse, and one of two words used in the NT for “hell.” He speaks of going to that place and likens it to “εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον – going into the unquenchable fire.” *The Big Burn* by Timothy Egan is a good read. It’s the story of a 1910 forest fire that wiped out about three million mostly forested acres, mostly in Idaho and Montana.

Accounts of people trying to escape the blaze are troubling, and in many cases there simply was not escape, and people were burned alive. Imagine the pain, and then imagine that pain for eternity. Another, more current example are the 9/11 attacks. Reference a bon-fire or a wood stove or a fireplace or a house on fire or a grass fire, all very familiar places one might find fire.

In preaching, I do not dwell for long on such gruesome thoughts, certainly nothing like the infamous *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* by Jonathon Edwards. That sermon wonderfully preaches the Law, but is completely void of any Gospel, leaving the sinner in a lurch. It doesn’t take long at all for people to realize that they want not part of hell, as their body language will clearly and loudly tell you.

When I’m talking about heaven, we will often linger there, like when you go to Ikea, not really wanting to leave, taking it all in, dwelling on the bliss that awaits us. And if I’m going to use fire or drowning to make the listener feel things that are not nice, then I’m going to use things like the endless best day ever, or the vacation that never ends (not even Bart Simpson was able to pull that one off), or the Pizza Hut buffet.

Here the body language says that we like hearing this, tell me more. If you aren’t watching body language, then you need to start doing that. If people are interested and listening, they will be watching you and responding to you, and you will feed off of them. If they are not interested, they will be doing other things; looking out the window, dozing, balancing the checkbook, and you will need to do something different.

44. Now He speaks of hell as a place where “ὅπου ὁ σκόληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτᾷ, καὶ τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται – their worm never ends, and the fire is not quenched.” Robertson (WP) and Barclay (BCLY) both think that this description fits an actual place in Palestine, The Valley of Hinnom “a ravine outside of Jerusalem,” (BCLY), and the origin of the word “γέενναν – hell.”

Robertson says that, “The Valley of Hinnom had been desecrated by the sacrifice of children to Molech so that as an accursed place it was used for the city garbage where worms gnawed and fires burned.” Barclay speaks more extensively of the repeated desecrations that took place there over the years. The place brings to mind the perpetual Springfield Tire Fire, aka The Great Tire Fire.

Verses forty-six and forty-eight say exactly the same thing as verse forty-four, and several manuscripts leave out vv. 46-48.

45. Now, Jesus moves on to the foot. The foot often gets people into trouble by taking it to places where trouble is to be found. In the time of Jesus, almost everybody got from one place to another by foot, and the person who was missing a foot was the person who isn’t going to get around nearly as well as the footed person. The question is; to what places will your feet take you? Will you use these wonderful creations that God has given you to go to church, to do your vocation, to help others, or will you use them to go to places where sin is expected and encouraged?

47. And finally, the eye as a potential trouble-maker. Traveling again to the Ten Commandments, we note that the breaking of several of them begins with seeing things with the eye. And of course, Jesus singled out the eye as the body part that often leads to a man lusting after a woman (Matthew 5:27ff.), and this in a day when women were much more covered up than they are today.

These days, our eyes are almost ceaselessly bombarded by images that cannot help but tempt to sin, much more in teenage boys than in those of us who are over fifty. Here, and with the hand and foot, I would speak in general terms and in euphemism, and not specifically and graphically, like the old movies used to. People will fill in the blanks with their imagination and with the specifics that trouble them.

49. He finishes this discourse by talking about salt, saying that, “everyone will be salted with fire, and every sacrifice will be salted with salt.” Barclay points out that, “According to Jewish Law every sacrifice must be salted with salt before it was offered to God on the altar,” and he takes this saying to mean that “Before a Christian life becomes acceptable to God it must be treated with fire, just as every sacrifice is treated with salt.” It goes without saying, at least by Barclay, that fire is involved in sacrifice. It needs to be said that our acceptability comes only because of The Sacrifice; Jesus.

50. As noted previously, this verse sounds a lot like Matthew 5:13-14, and has the same application, with a twist. As noted in previous notes on that verse, salt that has lost its saltiness, a physical property of salt, is by definition no longer salt. He is saying to these Christians, who are lately acting like anything *but* Christians, that good works are a physical property of Christians, and if you don’t see any good works, then you are by

definition not looking at Christians. And if you don't get that, then maybe you will get this, His last word "εἰρηνεύετε – be at peace with one another," you who are more interested in your turf than you are about the children.

Law/Gospel

Arrogant Adult/Humble Child – Leave it to adults to think too highly of themselves, like the men here. Leave it to children to not think that, but instead to realize how dependent they are on the adults in their lives, and on God for salvation.

Sin/Grace – We are tempted to sin, and to cause others to sin, and for that we go to hell. Jesus was tempted to sin, and resisted the temptation, and never once caused another to sin. He was punished on the cross for our sins, and for that we go to heaven.

Sermon Titles

The One Not Against Us

Children and Faith

Hands, Feet, and Eyes

To be Burned and Drowned

Christian Turf Wars

Hymns

Jesus Loves Me! This I Know – LSB 588

Jesus Sinners Does Receive – LSB 609

Father Welcomes – LSB 605

Jesus Loves the Little Children – Internet

Pick children's songs that the children know, and that the adults also know. If the children know different songs from the songs that the adults learned as children, maybe it's time to take a look at which songs the children are learning; are they Lutheran or are they Reformed?

Rev. Steven L. Anderson

Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Mark).
Intervarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by
William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark..* The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*. Concordia Publishing House,
1993

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek
Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek
Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford
University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of
Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html