

Introductory

Parts of this pericope have parallels in parts of Matthew and Luke. See *Gospel Parallels*. The first exchange recorded here (38-41), John telling 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.

Mark's quoting of Jesus on salt (vv. 49-50), sounds like Jesus talking about salt in the Sermon on the Mount. 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 to be read on Pentecost 19B. LSB has Matthew 18:1-20 as the appointed reading for Proper 18A.

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, and He taught them using a child who was there as an object.

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 they took it upon themselves 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 than others.

And they like to boast about forbidding other Christians – who have been authorized – from doing good works, like casting out demons, 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 plethora of Anti-Anabaptist material for then.

Textual Notes

38. John responds to the proclamation of Jesus that they should maybe mimic children more by switching the subject, “Ἐφη αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰωάννης Διδάσκαλε, εἶδομέν τινα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου ἐκβάλλοντα δαιμόνια, ὃς οὐκ ἀκολουθεῖ ἡμῖν – John responded, ‘Teacher, we saw a certain (person) in your name casting out demons, who was not following us.’”

The verb that begins this sentence, “φημί – to respond,” 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.

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? What John is doing, first of all, is changing the subject. The subject had been that Jesus wanted to talk about His upcoming trip to Jerusalem, and they wanted to talk about how great each of them was – or not.

John wants Jesus to know that when they saw that person doing that thing, they told him to stop it, “καὶ ἐκωλύομεν αὐτόν, ὅτι οὐκ ἠκολούθει ἡμῖν – and we forbade him, because he does not follow us.” We note that John’s objection to the man is not that the man isn’t following Jesus, but that the man is not following “ἡμῖν – us,” Jesus and the group.

By doing that, John reminds Jesus – Who had caught them talking about what they talked about and not listening to Him, and then He used a child to criticize them – that we are all playing on the same team. It’s what you do when there is conflict in the group – whether the football team, the military, the congregation, or the family, “Hey, we’re the Millers.”

The complaint is that the man is usurping their apostolic authority. Only they were the ones, he is saying, who are authorized to do things like that. Indeed, they *had* been given authority to cast out demons, and they had in fact done just that, and two weeks ago, in the case of the boy with the demon problem, they were *unable* to cast out that demon.

When they asked Him, in private, why they had been unable to cast the demon out of the boy, He told them that it was because they had neglected to ask God to do that, perhaps thinking that they somehow had that power on their own, maybe even forgetting from whence that power came. Here John is reasserting the apostolic authority of the Twelve,

The verb “ἐκωλύομεν – they were forbidding,” an imperfect form of κωλύω; they kept trying to get the man to stop doing what he was doing. 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.

39. John reminds Jesus that casting out of demons is in their bailiwick, not in the bailiwick of that unnamed man. Jesus asserts that the bailiwick is broader than that, “Μὴ κωλύετε αὐτόν – stop forbidding him,” and the person is affirmed to be a male. The negator “Μὴ” followed by a present imperative means to stop doing what is being done.

He then gives the reason why you should stop stopping the man from doing what the man is doing, “οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὃς ποιήσει δύναμιν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου καὶ δυνήσεται ταχὺ κακολογῆσαί με – because nobody who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon to speak evil of me.” It is noteworthy that He repeats John’s report, “in my name.”

That means that the man who is casting out demons is a probably a Christian, and at the very least it means that the man recognizes that “in the name” – by the power of Jesus – is how one goes about casting out demons. Compare and contrast the Twelve who were unable to cast the demon out of the boy because they had forgotten that very thing.

We have spoken here before about how the authority to do miracles was limited, and 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, and that power is given to us today.

With the decline of the Christian religion, demonic activity is on the rise in Christendom. In Spain, for example, the priests there are kept very busy exorcising them, all the while being criticized by the increasingly anti-Christian masses for it. As for the Lutherans, demons and exorcisms are things that we believe, but we don’t talk much about them.

Everything is available on the Internet, and you can read about the Lutherans and exorcism at www.conservapedia.com/Exorcism and you can read a very nice, very thorough article about that and Baptism, written 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. Or *I Am Not Afraid* by Robert H. Bennett (CPH) is very good.

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. People who have that power will 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 they have used it, and they 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.

Having been sent out, when The Seventy return, they marvel that, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name (17).” Did you see how they noted that their power came from Jesus (“in your name”)? Compare and contrast to the Twelve, who could not cast out the demon from the boy because they forgot to ask for it.

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 ἐστιν – whoever is not against us is for us,” should never be explained by using American denominationalism. 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, who believed like Jesus did.

It’s not unheard of for somebody like the Twelve to be maybe too quick to think that somebody was treading on their turf. They moved quickly to protect that turf, not recognizing that the turf belonged to the Seventy as well as to them. It’s an ecclesiastical phenomenon with which Missouri Synod people are familiar, and we see it all the time.

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 believed alike.

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, the simplest and most basic form of hospitality, saying that whoever gives to you a cup of water “ἐν ὀνόματι ὅτι Χριστοῦ ἐστέ – because you are in the name of Christ,” that’s a good thing, not a bad thing.

As far as the person who gives the cup of water, “ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐ μὴ ἀπολέσῃ τὸν μισθὸν αὐτοῦ - truly I say to you that he will never, ever, lose his reward.” By saying that, He is encouraging people to treat Christians well. Such an admonition to treat Christians well would be especially noted by Christians, and He’s talking to the Twelve.

John wants to boast to Jesus about how they saw what they saw and did what they did. Jesus tells them to stop doing what they were doing, and to take it one step further. If the man who gives a Christian a cup of water – the most basic and expected hospitality – gets a reward for that act, how much more a Christian who casts out demons will be rewarded.

42. The children are still in the house, and He is still teaching, and He had taken that child and made it the center of attention. He is interrupted by John’s pronouncement and complaint of others casting out demons, and the did what they did. But Jesus wants instead to talk about children, and He gives this warning to the adults about the children.

Compare and contrast the simple and basic act of giving a cup of water to a Christian and being rewarded for that with “Καὶ ὃς ἂν σκανδαλίσῃ ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων – whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to lose his faith,” will not be rewarded, but instead he will suffer the harshest of consequences.

Note the word “μικρῶν – micros – little ones” 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. In addition, the next time the hearer microwaves her burrito, he shaves, or goes for a brew, he may think of the sermon.

The Greek word has come down to us intact; it means a (comparative) very small thing. In that day it meant (superlative) the smallest 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 Christian faith.

The verb is “σκανδαλίζω,” and we’ve talked about that word before, but there are always new people, and the translations that render that word “offend” or something like that don’t quite – they fail miserably to communicate the seriousness of this hypothetical. The word means “to snare in a trap.” Satan is always trying to snare Christians in his trap,

And like the wicked witch in the story, he especially likes little children, and he 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.

For that, your reward is “καλὸν ἔστιν αὐτῷ μᾶλλον εἰ περὶκειται μύλος ὀνικὸς περὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ βέβληται εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν – it would be better for him is a great millstone was hung around his neck and cast into the sea.” Many people don’t know what a mill is, never mind the mill stone. Explain it to them; it’s a very large stone.

Cause your hearer to feel what it must feel like to have a stone tied around your neck and then tossed into the water, like when 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

It was not a good feeling. They say that Mahone had a lot of demons...

Good art, and good preaching, makes us feel things, pathos. We ought to deliberately create pathos in the hearer. That doesn’t mean that it’s *all* about feelings – we engage the mind too – but it does mean that emotion is given to man by God, and we all feel things all the time, and 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 taught by many and believed by some, Jesus continues with another hypothetical, that these men, who are Christian, who are saved, may also be ensnared by Satan and abandon the Faith, and no longer be saved. Once they were saved, then they were not saved.

Using the same conditional language He used in the previous verse, He talks about the hand, He talks about the foot, and He talks about the eye as possible avenues for Satan to do what he does. He begins here with the hand. You have heard it said, “Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop.” I say to you that whoever made that up knew about the hand.

Without being too graphic, think of all the things that Satan can encourage you to do with your hands. They are things done that are not what the hands are made for, and they are often bad things, sins. Running down the list of the Ten Commandments, several of them are hard, if not downright impossible to break without using one’s hand or hands.

This saying is hyperbole, exaggeration for effect. Clearly, Jesus does not want people to maim themselves by 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's 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 it's going to get you into hell, which last forever, *then* it's better to remove that hand, which you would only until you die. It's a comparative proposition, and the loss of a hand is better than the loss of eternal life. It's 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 – has to be true, 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.

On the other hand, Christian would reasonably conclude that I would rather keep both of my hands *and* go to heaven, and so I need to get my hands under control and keep them under control. That's the Law, and the Law always convicts, even when the dictates of the Law seem impossible to obey. Preach the Law in its fullness, and the Gospel too.

He speaks very clearly and unambiguously here 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 ἀσβεστον – going into the unquenchable fire," and nobody wants to do that, do they?

The Big Burn by Timothy Egan is a good read, and PBS made it into a show. 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 to death 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, and where the hearer may be expected to be exposed to actual fire. But don't dwell on those things for long.

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 no 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 wanting to leave, taking it all in, dwelling on the bliss that awaits. 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 an endless best day ever, the vacation that never ends or Pizza Hut buffet.

Here the body language says 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 them. If they are not interested, they will be doing other things, like looking out the window or dozing,

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, and you need the pair.

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? If the latter, then it would be better to cut them off – hyperbole – for the same reason as above.

47. And finally, the eye as a potential troublemaker. Traveling again to the Ten, we note that the breaking of several of them begins with seeing things with the eye. Jesus singled out the eye as the body part that often leads to a man lusting after a woman (Matthew 5:27ff.), and women in those days 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 over fifty. Here, and with the hand and foot, I would speak in general terms and in euphemism, like the old movies and TV shows used to, and not specifically and graphically. People will fill in the blanks.

48. 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),

They also think that place is 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.

49. He finishes with, “Πᾶς γὰρ πυρὶ ἀλισθήσεται. – everyone will be salted with fire.” Barclay says, “According to Jewish Law every sacrifice must be salted with salt before it was offered to God on the altar.” He takes this to mean “Before a Christian life becomes acceptable to God it must be treated with fire, just as every sacrifice is treated with salt.”

So, it goes without saying, at least by Barclay, that fire and salt are involved in sacrifice. It needs to be said that our acceptability comes only because of The Sacrifice; Jesus. Some manuscripts add the obvious and redundant, “καὶ πᾶσα θυσία ἀλλὶ ἀλισθήσεται – and every sacrifice will be salted with salt,” but I think I would forget about it.

50. As noted in previous notes on that Matthew 5: 13-14, saltiness is a physical property of salt. Salt that has lost its saltiness is therefore no longer salt, by definition. He is saying to these Christians, that good works are a physical property of Christians, and if you don't see any good works, then you are not looking at Christians, by definition.

And if you don't get that, then maybe you will get this, “ἔχετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἅλα καὶ εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἀλλήλοις – have salt among yourselves and be at peace with one another.” Christians being at peace with one another is the desired outcome, as is our being one, and things like that happen more than you think, but we certainly are not perfect.

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

To be Burned and Drowned

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
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, IA

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