

Pentecost 19B  
October 11, 2009  
Hymns: 586 - 530 - 773 - 539

**MARK 9:38-50**  
**CAN'T WE ALL GET ALONG?**  
**\*Peace Between Us and God.**  
**\*Peace Between Us And Fellow Christians.**

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ – one and all part of God’s family of believers, **(slide 1)** It has been estimated that there are more than 33,000 denominations of Christianity in the entire world. There are not nearly that many in the U.S., but some of the groups are kind of interesting. For example one group is called, “The Church of the Kennedy Worshipers.” That’s a church which actually believes that it can pray to the late President John F. Kennedy, and be cured both of defects and terminal diseases. Then there’s “The Church of the Ministry of Universal Wisdom.” They’re looking for flying saucers to come. The proliferation of various expressions of *Christian faith* in this country is astounding. I understand that there are more than a hundred varieties of Baptist churches alone, including the Northern Baptists, Southern Baptists, General Baptists, Particular Baptists, Seventh-day Baptists, Hard Shell Baptists, Free Will Baptists, Duck River and Kindred Association Baptists, and the Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists.

That’s just Baptists. Almost every other major group, including Lutherans, has off-shoots as well. A group called the Church of God had a branch break off, calling itself the True Church of God, and a group split off from that calling itself the Only True Church of God. Many of those denominations was formed when somebody got upset about something and headed off on their own. This is ironic when you consider today’s text from the Gospel of Mark.

Jesus is teaching in Capernaum. One of His disciples, John, comes to Him and says, **(slide 2)** *“Teacher, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in My name can in the next moment say anything bad about Me, for whoever is not against us is for us.”* Interesting.

A Mark from Wisconsin stopped by a pet store one day to look for a bird. As he entered the store, he noticed a strange rustling noise coming from the back. In the back of the store was a large cage with a sign underneath it advertising “Sacred Doves of Peace.” And in the cage were two white doves . . . beating each other to a pulp. I would like to say that is the way of the world, but it has often been the way of the church as well. It reminds me of a proposal made by the Mennonite Church a few years ago. The Mennonites historically have been a church that advocates peace. Here was their proposal: Can’t we agree that as Christians we at least won’t kill other Christians? Now there was a time in history when Christians quite readily killed one another.

The great Civil War fought in this country nearly a century and a half ago often pitted brother against brother, and father against son. At that time we were predominately a Christian nation. The story is told of a Christmas Eve during that war. There had been a truce called between the two warring sides for the holiday. From one side’s trenches there arose the sound of Christmas carols. Shortly, soldiers from both sides were out of the trenches onto neutral ground and joining together in the singing of Silent Night: *All is calm, all is bright .... sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace!* A little more than a day later they would be back at trying to kill one another. A recent example, still fresh in our minds, is that of Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. True, that conflict was more political than religious. But this was the simple proposal of the Mennonites: Can’t we agree that as Christians we won’t kill other Christians?

Liberals objected that this proposal makes it sound okay to kill Muslims or atheists or Hindus, which of course isn’t the point. Conservatives protested that this proposal might make war impossible. After all, most of our bloodiest conflicts have been against other so-called Christian countries. Just try to imagine what the world would be like if we took that proposal seriously--that we will not be responsible for the death of any baptized person.

Even that humble proposal came across to many believers as too utopian. It always amuses me when people say we live in a post-Christian society. Friends, we still live in a pre-Christian society. The Gospel has not been tried and found wanting; the Gospel isn’t getting tried nearly as much as it should! Not at a practical everyday level. The words of our Master shame us. “You have heard that it was said, *‘Love your neighbor*

***and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:43-45).***

Can’t we all get along? (slide 3) Most of you recognize that question. God’s call for the world is that we shall all get along. Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals, liberals, First World, Third World, rich, poor, young, old--it grieves the heart of God that we cannot heal the brokenness of our world. Why is that? It is because of sin. And in dealing with the issue of sin, it is of first importance that we find peace between ourselves and God.

(slide 4) There will be no peace in our world, our neighborhoods, or in our families until there is peace in our own hearts. There is an insecurity within us that causes us to resent “the other guy.” The basic cause of hatred is fear. The only cure is found in *I John 4:18*, “*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear . . .*” There is only one source of perfect love and that is God. God is love (*I John 4:8*). We need to so fill our hearts and our minds with the love of God that there is no room for hatred and resentment of others.

There can be no peace between people, until and unless there is peace with God. The snow yesterday reminds us that we are only two plus months away from Christmas. Remember what the angels sang that sacred night over the hills of Bethlehem?: “*On earth peace to men on whom (God’s) favor rests.*” (**Luke 2:14**) Mankind has been at war with God ever since Adam and Eve chose to compete with God in the knowledge of good and evil. By nature you and I were born enemies of God, along with Satan and his demons. But God declared peace with mankind in His Son Jesus. All God’s animosity against the sin of the world, Jesus took on Himself and bore its punishment on the cross. In Baptism God the Holy Spirit washed away all that conflict-causing sin and set up His home in our heart. We are at peace and one with God. Yes, we do still sin – every day! But we can look to our loving God in Christ and find forgiveness and peace with God in the cross. To remember and treasure that great peace we have with God, moves us to want a rich measure of that peace with our fellow man, especially those who call Jesus “Lord.”

Some time ago there was an interesting story about whales that were trapped in the ice off the coast of Alaska. These whales swam in the cool waters of Alaska so long that they missed the last plane to Hawaii! They were completely enclosed by the deepening ice. Some people saw their plight and tried to rescue them by sawing through the ice, but they were unsuccessful and called for additional help. The United States Navy sent in a ship to rescue the whales. That, too, failed. Finally, a Soviet icebreaker was asked to plow through the ice allowing the whales to swim out into the open sea. This was in American waters, and thus, before the Russian ship started its work, a United States of America flag was raised on its mast. People, especially the Press Corps, could hardly believe it! Here was a U.S.A. flag on a Russian ship! A whale was used to bring two countries, often at odds with each other, together for the sake of rescue. (slide 5)

It’s interesting. God also used a whale to get the attention of the prophet Jonah – and to rescue souls from hell. As you’ll remember, Jonah was prejudiced against the people of Nineveh. The Assyrians had brought great grief upon God’s people. Time and again, these enemies had carried out raids of pillage and annihilation against Israel. Jonah wanted God to destroy the people of that city. And then God sent a whale . . . and then a gourd . . . and then a worm. Finally Jonah got the message. Basically the message of the little book of Jonah is God saying to his stubborn prophet, “Jonah, can’t we all get along?” God showed Jonah that God loved the people of Nineveh just as much as God loved the people of Israel. The Lord proved it by working a great repentance and conversion in that city. “Jonah, can’t we all get along?”

It’s a message we still need to hear. All the world’s people belong to God. God loves us all the same. God’s will is liberty and justice for all the world’s people - and much more....salvation and eternal life! But here is what we also need to realize: there will not be peace in the world – much less peace between God in heaven and the people of the world - until each of us Christians resolves to live out the message of Christ’s love in our own families and neighborhoods. You and I as believers are the salt of the earth. Jesus says here, ***Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.*** If you and I cannot love one another as Christians, there is no hope for the world. If you and I cannot love our neighbor in the same way Christ loves us and gave Himself for us, then we cannot expect peace to come to the world.

Last year there was a story about the first home run that Sara Tucholsky of Western Oregon University ever hit. With two runners on base and a strike against her, Sara did something she had never done before. She hit a home run. But then as she started to run around the bases, she missed first base. Realizing what she had done, she started back to tag it and then something terrible happened. Sara collapsed with a knee injury. She crawled back to first base but couldn’t go on. She would be called out if her teammates tried to help her. The umpire said a pinch runner could be called in, but the homer would count as a single.

Then, the members of the opposing Central Washington University softball team did something that stunned spectators. Central Washington first baseman Mallory Holtman asked the umpire if she and her teammates could help Sara. The umpire said there was no rule against it. So Holtman and shortstop Liz Wallace put their arms under Sara's legs, and she put her arms over their shoulders. The three players headed around the bases, stopping to let Sara touch each base with her good leg. The three-run homer would count. Here's what's amazing. Listen up all you sports addicts. This act of sportsmanship by the Central Washington team contributed to their own elimination from the playoffs, for they ended up losing that game. There was a price to their compassion, but still they did what was right. Sports writers around the country have hailed this event as the ultimate act of sportsmanship. Others have said it is the "greatest moment in sports history" anyone has ever seen. **(slide 6)** I say it reflects a change that must take place in human hearts before God's kingdom comes on earth, even as it is in heaven. It starts when you and I repent of our lovelessness, and resolve to do God's will.

I grew up in a competitive home environment. We kids in our house, together with cousins and neighbors played everything from baseball, to cards, to board games to win. As I grew and became aware of other churches in our town of Antigo, Wisconsin, I developed a sense that we were in competition with the other Lutheran churches, the Catholic Churches, and the Protestant churches. Like John in our text, I did not think of the other congregations as being "one of us." It's true churches of other faiths are not in fellowship with us. Christ's Great Commission states that we are to teach (souls) to obey everything He has commanded us.

In both letters to Timothy, Paul underscores the importance of holding firmly to Biblical truths with these words: ***Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith (1 Timothy 6:20-21). What you have heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit, Who lives in us (2 Timothy 1:13-14).***

Yet, where the Word at least in some measure of its purity is proclaimed and even better the Sacraments properly administered – there is faith! There is the Holy Spirit doing His work. His Word will not return to Him empty! Souls will find peace with God in the cross of Christ. Souls will find life and salvation. ***Whoever is not against us is for us!*** May we live at peace with all people: People of our congregation and fellowship; people of whatever Christian stripe; people who have yet to be won to Christ – that they too may find the peace we know between ourselves and the Lord. May we truly be a salt to the earth, and a light to the world – showing the way to Christ, Who is the Way and the Truth and the Life of peace everlasting. Amen.

May He Who began His good work in you carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ! Amen.