Pentecost 19 Mark 9:38-50
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No One Said It Would Be Easy
I. Working with fellow Christians.
II. Living with fellow Christians – and ourselves!

Dear Christian friends,

It happens **too often**. People start something but never finish it. Their glorious plans crumble before the "IT'S HARDER than I thought." A **month ago** our children were excited about school. **Now** it's "I DON'T GET it! It's TOO HARD!" I was determined that my garden this year it would be **weed free**. **My garden** is a MONUMENT to good intentions. But then, "NO ONE SAID it **would be easy**!"

There's much in life that's "NOT EASY." But that doesn't mean we just GIVE UP. School isn't **always easy** but dropping out isn't the answer. Raising children isn't **always easy** but GIVING IN to them **all the time** and raising SPOILED BRATS **isn't the answer**. A good marriage isn't easy. It takes a lot of HARD WORK and **sacrifices**. But it's worth fighting and working for. NO ONE SAID it **would be easy**!

The same goes in the **daily life** of us Christians. Our salvation is a GLORIOUS FREE GIFT of God. Our relationship with God is ALL GOD'S DOING – built on God's **love** and **forgiveness** in Jesus. Then there's the **day-to-day living** AS A CHILD of God. NO ONE SAID IT WOULD BE EASY! Jesus makes that clear here. **No one said it would be easy** 1)working with **fellow Christians** and 2)living with fellow Christians – AND OURSELVES!

I. Working with our fellow Christians.

In **last week's gospel** reading the disciples were arguing over ***"who was the greatest."*** Jesus had to teach them that the GREATEST CHRISTIAN stands at the foot of the **cross** and THE END of the **line**. **Now** John interrupts Jesus. LOOKING BACK John isn't sure if he **handled a situation** correctly. Rather than SHRUG IT OFF John took it to Jesus. ***"Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in Your name. We tried to stop him, because he was not following us."***

We must be careful here. We don't have ALL THE FACTS to **be able** to correctly understand this situation. But then NEITHER DID JOHN! That was John's problem. WE don't know **for sure** WHO this man was. Neither did John! But this man did have **tremendous** respect for Jesus. ***"In Jesus' name"*** he was driving out demons.

John didn't have ENOUGH FACTS **to judge** what was going on. **Unfortunately** that didn't stop John from TAKING ACTION. ***"We tried to stop him, because he was not following us."*** "The NERVE of this guy doing that **without** OFFICIAL APPROVAL!" Without THEIR approval. John acted like Joshua in the OT reading. Joshua wanted Moses to stop Eldad and Medad from prophesying. **Sure**, **they had** GOD'S APPROVAL but they hadn't gone through the PROPER CHANNELS.

"Do not try to stop him," Jesus said. Then He explained why. ***"Because no one who does a miracle in My name will be able soon afterward to speak evil about Me. Whoever is not against us is for us."*** There are ONLY TWO TYPES of people in the world – those ***"for"*** and those ***"against"*** Jesus. **A person** is either a believer in Jesus as his Savior OR he's not. There is NO THIRD CHOICE.

John looked at this man ONE WAY - Jesus in ANOTHER way. John saw him as a THREAT and ***"against"*** Jesus. Jesus saw him as ***"for"*** Him and a FRIEND. Each acted ACCORDINGLY.

How do you see people – and especially your **fellow Christians**? NO ONE SAID it **would be easy** working with fellow Christians. We are all different. We have DIFFERENT TASTES – interests – **talents** – **personalities** – opinions. But that shouldn't interfere in our **relationships**. **Just because** we don't see EYE-TO-EYE on something doesn't make us **enemies**. I have no right to say, "**Whoever**

is NOT WITH me is **against** me." That's true about a **person's** relationship with Jesus but NOT their relationship **with me**.

NO ONE SAID it **would be easy** working with fellow Christians but we must be careful **not to make** each other the ENEMY. A teacher can't approach a **troublesome student** or **parent** as the ENEMY. Parents and children can't **approach a teacher** as the ENEMY just because the teacher works the child hard. A pastor can't approach a **long-time** delinquent as the enemy. MEMBERS can't approach a fellow Christian **with whom** they've had a disagreement as the ENEMY. That attitude destroys what GOD MADE US – brothers and sisters **in Christ**.

As fellow Christians God calls us to worship and work TOGETHER. NO ONE SAID it **would be easy** – not when each one of us has a **sinful nature** that can BE SO PROUD and **stubborn**. It may NOT BE EASY but I have no right to MAKE IT HARDER with my own petty pride and **selfishness**. We are FELLOW CHRISTIANS. Each one of us is LOVED **by God**. **Each one** of us has a valuable contribution to make – **even if** it's ONLY as Jesus says ***"giving a cup of water in My name."***

SO MUCH for John's interruption. Jesus returns to what He had been saying. Right before this Jesus had ***"taken a little child in His arms and said, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little ones in My name welcomes Me and the One who sent Me.'"*** Jesus now continues with that train of thought. His point is that NO ONE SAID it **would be easy**…

II. Living with fellow Christians – and ourselves!

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to fall into sin, it would be better for him if he were thrown into the sea with a large millstone hung around his neck." Jesus brings up a VERY REAL and dangerous situation – GIVING OFFENSE. We must be careful to distinguish between GIVING and TAKING offense. TAKING offense is being petty and **selfish**. Someone politely SHOOTS DOWN a **suggestion** I make. I storm out and **pout**. That's TAKING offense. The **other person** didn't sin BY NOT AGREEING with me. I SINNED by getting all upset – by FOCUSING ON MYSELF and my hurt pride – **instead** of focusing on my Savior and my **fellow Christian**.

GIVING offense is causing a person to sin and fall away from Jesus. That can happen SO EASILY and in SO MANY WAYS – **by the way** we talk - act - treat someone – by the EXAMPLE we set. Let's take some examples.

Your children hear you **cursing**. **What** have they learned FROM YOU? Breaking the Second Commandment is **no big deal**. Children hear dad brag about **goofing off** at work – what have they learned? It's OK to be lazy and cheat people. You drop your children off for Sunday School – you send them to our Christian day school – but you don't bring them to church or stay for Bible class yourself. **What** have they learned FROM YOU? God's Word is FOR CHILDREN. Adults have MORE IMPORTANT THINGS to do.

Or, there are some children sitting behind you in church. **Yes**, they SHOULD **be quiet** but they're acting up some. Do you **later** let those struggling parents know that YOU HAD the **same problem** with your little angles but they did eventually learn to behave? OR do you turn around and stare at them? YOU **may have** just driven them away from church and God's Word. **Every week** we sit in the same pew. Then **one Sunday** – GASP! – someone sits in MY pew! Do you glare at that person and give them the EVIL EYE? I've seen it happen! Or a person can't find his way in the hymnal. He doesn't know if he should STAND or sit. The person's frustrated and **feels** OUT OF PLACE. Do you help that person or just think to yourself, "He **must be** a VISITOR? I wonder what he's doing here?"

Jesus uses STRONG LANGUAGE abut causing people to sin. ***"It would be better for him if he were thrown into the sea with a large millstone hung around his neck."*** I don't have to tell you that **if that happened** to you you'd BE DEAD. Jesus is saying it's BETTER TO BE DEAD than to

"cause someone to sin" and fall away from Jesus. Why? Look at the ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES of what you are doing **to others**.

It doesn't get **any easier** LIVING WITH OURSELVES. ***"If your hand causes you to fall into sin - if your foot causes you to fall into sin - if your eye causes you to fall into sin"*** – each time Jesus says, "CUT IT OFF!" **Each time** Jesus explains why. ***"It is better for you to enter life lame, etc., than to be thrown into hell"*** forever.

People like to excuse their sin with, "That's JUST THE WAY I am" or "NOBODY'S perfect." Jesus doesn't buy that. Sin is NOTHING TO JOKE about. To die in sin is to **go to hell** – a VERY REAL and eternal hell. You can't get more serious than what Jesus is here.

So if the friends I **hang around** with are leading me to **ignore or defy** God I must AMPUTATE – cut them out of my life **before** they cut God out of my life. If the music I listen to or the TV shows I watch are leading me to **ignore God** – to TAKE LIGHTLY **God's** commandments – then I must AMPUTATE – must stop listening/watching them **before** they get me to STOP LISTENING to God. We could go on with other examples. NO ONE SAID it **would be easy** living with ourselves!

Cutting off a hand, etc., won't stop us from sinning. MORE RADICAL SURGERY is needed – a heart transplant! ***"Create in me a clean heart, O God,"*** we pray. God does just that THROUGH THE GOSPEL. These verses are a good reminder of HOW DESPERATELY we need Jesus as our Savior. **Only** in Jesus' shed blood do we have PERFECT CLEANSING from all our sins. **Only** in Jesus' perfect life do we **have the righteousness** to stand acceptable before God. **Only** in Jesus' resurrection from the dead do we have the sure hope of eternal life in heaven when we die. NO ONE SAID it **would be easy** for Jesus to save us from our sin, death, hell. But Jesus is NO QUITTER!

NO ONE SAID it **would be easy** for us either. These verses make that clear. But let's not be QUITTERS either. Keep your eyes on your **Savior** and the **heavenly goal**. It WON'T BE EASY but it is eternally WORTH IT! Amen.

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