

Proper 21 (17th Sunday after Pentecost)
September 27, a.D. 2009
Mark 9: 38 – 50

Last night my daughter's soccer team wrapped up their successful season with a dinner at Kelsey's. As I reminisced about the season and thankful for the privilege to assist the coach, one game came to mind in which we did not look good as a team. Early in the season before the teams are separated into stronger and weaker divisions, we won a game by the score of 12 – 0. It looked as if we were running up the score on a weaker team. Some of our girls were competing to see how fast they could score the next goal. This poor sportsmanship reflected on the coaches.

Some parents get very upset about how their children behave because they feel that their children's behavior is a reflection of them. They have a strong need to look good to others.

That is why the disciples wanted Jesus to stop the man who was casting out demons in Jesus' name. That man was not part of the group. He was not making Jesus (or them) look good. He was making himself look good. After all, when he cast out those demons, people would thank him and praise him instead of Jesus. The disciples were jealous, for Jesus, and mostly for themselves.

This need to look good to others is to speak evil of Jesus. It is to be against Jesus. It is to put a stumbling block before one of the little ones who believe in Jesus. Little ones who believe in Jesus trust him to make them look good to God. The little ones do not trust their own behavior, their own good behavior, to make themselves look good to others, especially not God.

How can anyone make themselves look good to God? We are to reflect God's goodness, not try to use some other way to look good to God. To try and look good to God is to use some other way as what we trust, as our god. We do not trust God to make us good. We do not trust God to be compassionate to us. We will show God what is good instead of God showing us what is good.

Well, so are we jealous for ourselves, jealous to make ourselves look good? Why do we care so much what others think of us and care so little what God thinks? What would it be like to be without hands, feet and eyes? Or would we prefer to have our

hands, feet and eyes while being in a place where worms never die and the fire is not quenched?

Those words describing hell should send chills down the spine. Jesus is quoting the prophet Isaiah who wraps up his evangelical book with these words of warning for those who will not listen nor repent. It is a place of reward for those who have worked hard in trying to impress others and jealous of other's accomplishments.

Why do you care so much what other's think of you and strive to impress them when your own sin is the biggest problem? Sin causes your frustration, your anger and your depression. Stop daydreaming about receiving the praise of men. God is not fooled. He says you deserve the place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

Now listen, O sinner to the peace that only God gives. Drink from the Lord's cup of eternal life and refreshment given to you from his own hand. Be emptied of yourself, jealous ambitions, and love for riches. Receive only Jesus and no one and nothing else. Be filled with his blood which makes all things new.

You belong to Him because He said so. He named you in the waters of holy baptism as His child. He gave you his name and your inheritance in heaven long before any worldly ambition grabbed you. He bought you back at a price that cost him his own blood.

Now you enjoy the constant attention of Him who died for you, prays for you and defends you. You are His. He has swallowed up your sins and so now you cannot lose.

Come and drink the Cup offered in Christ's Name for you belong to Him. The worm is dead, the fire quenched by the water and blood that flowed from Jesus' side. You are loved.