

PENTECOST 19
NUMBERS 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29
JAMES 5:13-20
MARK 9:38-50
SEPTEMBER 29, 30, 2018

YEAR B

Several times a week I get phone calls from people I would rather not talk to. The phone calls are not from any of you. I want to talk with you. The phone calls are from people that want to help me with my student loans, help me sell my time-share and manage my credit card debt. I have been receiving phone calls from someone that wants to follow up with me on my application for a business loan. This call is different in that my phone does not ring. I just get a voice message. I usually block those phone numbers so that I will not receive phone calls from those groups. Blocking the numbers is usually an effort in futility because they usually just call from a different phone number. I have even received phone calls from my own telephone number. It is difficult to block your own number. One time I had a phone call from a number with the last four digits of 8301. I blocked it. The same group called from number 8302. When I blocked it they called from 8305. This went on for a while and I blocked each number. Most of us know what I am talking about when it comes to unwanted phone calls and email messages. Most of those kinds of phone calls are not meant to help us but the one that is calling. Quite often those phone calls are attempts to gain information that will actually hurt you if you give such information. It is important for us to not engage in phone conversations or emails with people that contact you in order to help you with your finances.

Our Bible readings today are about people helping other people. They are about those that are accepted by God to serve those in need and to actually do some good for God's people. We might say that the ones our readings are teaching are those we can be listened to as those because they will be good resources and give wise counsel. In Numbers, Moses complained that the whining and the constant complaining of the Israelites overwhelmed him. God advised Moses to call the elders to help Moses deal with those that were complaining. Moses

appointed 70 but then there were two that were not among the 70 elders who were also ministering for the Lord. When Joshua asked Moses to make them stop Moses refused. Those that minister for the Lord are also doing the will of God. James 5 is about calling the church when there is sickness or other difficulties. The church is to pray for those that are hurting so there can be healing and forgiveness of sins.

Mark 9:38, 39 John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”³⁹But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.

Last week we heard Jesus teach his disciples about greatness. He taught that those that would be great must become servants. We also heard that the first will be last. Today we hear the disciples whining to Jesus because there was some that were not part of the 12 were doing ministry in the name of Jesus. It seems the disciples forgot the teaching of Jesus about those that are accepted and those that are great. They were complaining because of what others were doing. As we look at these verses and many other readings in Mark’s gospel we discover a diversity among people. Several weeks ago we read of a Gentile woman who went to Jesus so her daughter might be healed. We had the discussion about who is accepted among God’s people and who can receive God’s blessings. In the end the woman did receive God’s blessing. There are other places where there is diversity among the people. Today, Jesus teaches his disciples that any who are following Jesus and any who are doing the deeds of power in his name will not be able to speak evil of Jesus or the kingdom of God.

It can get that way in the church sometimes. God has entrusted us with a ministry and has empowered us for that work. God sends people our direction and instructs us how to care for them. It is tempting to look over our shoulder at what other churches and other Christians are doing. We might become suspicious of the success of other churches and we might become prideful

because of those things we do better than other churches. Neither of these are what our Lord taught when it comes to serving the Lord.

In past generations there were issues between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants. The struggles usually came to the top when teenagers started dating. The struggles were more apparent when a teenager who was not Catholic brought home a teenager whose family was Catholic. In Catholic families it was the other way around. Parents and grandparents worried that the world was falling apart and our children were committing the unpardonable sin. It is interesting that my mother and father came together. They were married in 1944 when it was almost forbidden for Lutherans and Catholics to get together. My mother was Catholic and my father was Lutheran. They were able to move beyond the issues between the churches and enjoy 54 years of marriage. The world did not fall apart. Although I knew there were differences between the families I did not see the problem as being a major one. I still don't. I was the preacher at my sister's wedding at St. Michael's Catholic Church in Sioux City and the church ceiling did not fall in and my sister and her husband are still married.

Mark 9:40, 41 **Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.**

Last year was the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Last October Lutherans and Catholics joined as one body worshipping together. I believe God was pleased that those that were divided could come together as one. I believe the day is coming when we will not only worship in the same building but also be welcomed at the table of the Lord. What divides us is not as drastic as what unites us. We are united by the blood of Christ and we share a common gospel. Jesus is Lord of all and invites all to come to him. We must never be suspicious of those that claim the name of Jesus Christ and who work for the God's people.

There are many ways to serve the Lord. When we are sharing the gospel we are serving the Lord. I sometimes listen to television evangelists. I don't listen to them all and some I believe are probably not seeking to serve the Lord but are hoping to lift his or her own reputation. For me, it is not about who has the biggest and nicest building or who has the fastest jet. It is about the message. There are many wealthy pastors and congregations that are serving the Lord and going what the Lord teaches. They are going where the Lord is leading. When I listen to any preacher or teacher of God's word I am careful to listen with my ears to the preachers voice and my finger in the Bible. Those that are sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ are those that proclaim the truth and care for their people. They want what is just and they work for justice for all people. They don't seek to cause others to stumble but they serve the Lord by caring for God's people.

You and I must be careful when answering the telephone. It is OK to not speak to those that would seek to hurt you. You do not need to correspond with those that are searching for ways to scam you. God gave us ability to discern those things. The Lord does not want us to separate ourselves from other Christians. We are not to be suspicious of those that are not like us in practice. We embrace our brother and sisters in Christ and we do not speak evil against them. We trust the Lord to empower our ministry and to do the work we called to do in Jesus name. AMEN