

## **Sunday, September 29, 2024 – Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

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### **Introduction**

Someone who isn't part of Jesus' own circle is casting out demons in Jesus' name, and the disciples want him stopped. They appeal to Jesus, as Joshua did to Moses about the elders who prophesied without official authorization. Like Moses, Jesus refuses to see this as a threat. Jesus welcomes good being done in his name, even when it is not under his control. The circle we form around Jesus' word must be able to value good being done in ways we wouldn't do it, by people we can't keep tabs on.

### **Prayer of the Day**

Generous God, your Son gave his life that we might come to peace with you. Give us a share of your Spirit, and in all we do empower us to bear the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

### **First Reading: Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22**

<sup>1</sup>[King Ahasuerus] and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther.<sup>2</sup>On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." <sup>3</sup>Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. <sup>4</sup>For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king." <sup>5</sup>Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?" <sup>6</sup>Esther said, "A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. <sup>9</sup>Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." <sup>10</sup>So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

<sup>9:20</sup>Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, <sup>21</sup>enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, <sup>22</sup>as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

## Psalm 124

<sup>1</sup>If the LORD had not been on our side,  
let Israel now say;  
<sup>2</sup>**if the LORD had not been on our side,  
when enemies rose up against us,**  
<sup>3</sup>then would they have swallowed us up alive  
in their fierce anger toward us;  
<sup>4</sup>**then would the waters have overwhelmed us  
and the torrent gone over us;**  
<sup>5</sup>then would the raging waters  
have gone right over us.  
<sup>6</sup>**Blessed be the LORD  
who has not given us over to be a prey for their teeth.**  
<sup>7</sup>We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler;  
the snare is broken, and we have escaped.  
<sup>8</sup>**Our help is in the name of the LORD,  
the maker of heaven and earth.**

## Second Reading: James 5:13-20

<sup>13</sup>Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup>Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. <sup>17</sup>Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. <sup>18</sup>Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

<sup>19</sup>My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, <sup>20</sup>you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

## Gospel: Mark 9:38-50

<sup>38</sup>John said to [Jesus,] "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." <sup>39</sup>But 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. <sup>40</sup>Whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup>For 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.

<sup>42</sup>"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. <sup>43</sup>If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. <sup>45</sup>And if your foot

causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. <sup>47</sup>And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup>where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

<sup>49</sup>“For everyone will be salted with fire. <sup>50</sup>Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Prayers and introductions from  
[SundaysAndSeasons.com](http://SundaysAndSeasons.com)

## Prayers of Intercession

Drawn together in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray with confidence for the church, God's good creation, and all who are in need.

*A brief silence.*

We pray for the people of God in all places. Shape our witness to the good news of Jesus that we joyfully share your transforming love with all whom we encounter. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for the healing of the earth. Renew oceans and seas, marshes and estuaries. Uphold the work of conservationists, oceanographers, and all who care for fragile ecosystems and habitats. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for peace and cooperation among local and global communities. Bless the efforts of community organizers, international aid workers, and all those who work for justice and peace around the world. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for all who are in any need. To all who grieve, bring consolation; to all who are weary or lonely, bring solace. By your grace, make your presence known among all who call to you for healing. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for caregivers: doctors and nurses, home health aides and counselors, and those who care for loved ones. Sustain them in their work and help us to build a health care system that supports all. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We give thanks for the saints who now rest in your eternal presence. In thanksgiving for their lives of faithful service and witness, we commend them to your loving care. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust these and all our prayers to you, holy God, in the name of your beloved child, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

**Amen.**

## **A reflection for this nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

### **Don't Try to Stop God**

In Mark 9:38-50 the disciples—at least John—are upset because they saw somebody, not a disciple, “casting out demons” in Jesus’ name. Here John sounds strikingly similar to the Pharisees, who became upset when someone out of their control, Jesus, healed a person on the sabbath (Mark 3:1-6). A common tendency among religious leaders seems to be uneasiness with God acting in ways that are outside of the expected channels and outside of their control.

Throughout Mark’s gospel we are reminded that God’s activity and power are not controlled by or limited to established religious institutions. This point is made clear in the opening verses of the gospel. Mark doesn’t begin the story of the “good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1) in Jerusalem, where one might expect the story of a holy person to start. Instead, the beginning of Mark’s gospel takes us to the wilderness, a place often associated with the absence of God’s presence. But it is precisely in the wilderness where we find John, proclaiming that “the kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:15).

There was a sense in Jesus’ time that God could or would only be present in the temple, and that God’s activity was determined by the actions of the religious leaders. We have the same temptation today. We often think of what happens in the church building as God’s activity, but forget that God is also present and acting in the world outside the church. We often think of Christians doing God’s work, but neglect to notice the ways in which non-Christians are also active in doing things that help to bring God’s kingdom near. Jesus’ response to his disciple’s consternation about the fact that someone who is not a disciple is casting out demons in Jesus’ name is an important instruction to us as well. We shouldn’t stop someone who is doing God’s will and bringing God’s kingdom near, just because they aren’t a part of our group. In fact, we may even want to learn more about what they are doing, and join them!



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