

St Philip and St James
Palma de Mallorca Spain
26th September 2021
The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity
**Theme: The Beauty of
Shared/Collaborative/Team Ministry**

Text: Mark 9: 38-50

Introduction

In the name of God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen. We are still on a journey with the gospel of Mark and I like the aspect of continuing with one book for some time as this helps in understanding the flow of the narrative from one week to another. Last week's text was centered on embracing children and today the little ones are mentioned again but with a different emphasis. **Mark 9:38-10:31** are two of the most fascinating chapters because they are made of clustered moral teachings which appear unrelated. The danger with such texts is in trying to address all these moral teachings in one sermon and leave people confused. In order to avoid falling into the same trap, I will focus only on the first section of the gospel- **Mark 9:38-41** and leave the rest for future sermons.

Exegesis of the Text

The narrative begins with John coming to Jesus to report the incident that had happened while Jesus was away. What was the nature of the report? “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” Remember that John, the son of Zebedee was not just one of the twelve apostles but he, Peter and James constitute Jesus’ inner circle. The three had the privilege of experiencing God’s revelation more than others. This is because they had the privilege to be with Jesus on several special occasions; for example, the healing/resurrection of the daughter of the synagogue ruler, transfiguration, and at Gethsemane. However, the picture we get in the Gospels is that though these three had such privilege, they were quick to say the wrong thing. Peter rebuked Jesus when Jesus first foretold his death and resurrection, at the Transfiguration; Peter wanted to build three booths, one for Moses, one for Elijah and one for Jesus. When Jesus foretold his death a second time, James and John made a selfish request of one sitting on the right and the other on the left in the kingdom of God. Today, John finds that he has made another mistake.

The exorcist had probably observed the exorcism of a boy with a spirit reported in **9:14-29** and experimented with using Jesus’ name. This was a frustrating scenario because earlier on there was a boy was brought to the apostles who failed to exorcise the demon and now someone who is not among the twelve is successfully exorcising the demons. John is not coming to Jesus to seek counsel on how to handle the exorcist, but simply reports what his colleagues-the apostles have done. His

expectation was to receive praise from Jesus for doing the right thing. He expected Jesus to confirm their action but the reverse here is true. Listen carefully to John's statement; **“we tried to stop him because he was not following us.”** The implication of the statement is that the exorcist was supposed to follow Jesus and the twelve apostles. The right thing was to say, **“We tried to stop him because he was not following you.”** That would have carried much weight. In all invitation statements by Jesus, he never says, “Come after us,” meaning, “Come after Him and his disciples.” He frequently says, **“Come after me”** John has, without authority, broadened the concept of following to include the disciples. The issue of honour and shame is also at play here. The so-called certified disciples have failed to exorcise the demons and how can an “uncertified” person succeed in doing what they failed. Is our master embarrassing us by giving power to exorcise demons to the one who is not among the twelve, while we the chosen ones are failing? Probably this might have been the question that formed the basis of the frustration and anger. Again, why is this person using Jesus' name without authorization? John is surely concerned here, not only with protecting the sanctity of Jesus' name, but also with protecting the disciples' unique status as the chosen ones. If Jesus commissioned the twelve, he must intend for them to accomplish whatever work that is to be done in his name. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, who had the mission of destroying Jesus' ministry, the exorcist is not an enemy but is here to compliment the mission of fighting evil. The exorcist's work is in keeping with Jesus' concerns. While this exorcist would not meet the standard of authentic discipleship, Jesus shows sympathy for his work and

encourages his disciples to do the same. **“Whoever, is not against us is for us.”** This statement should not be taken as Jesus’ simplistic view of authentic ministry or criteria of distinguishing authentic ministry from an inauthentic one. Jesus is not opening a Pandora’s Box associated with ministry today. He is not opening the door to every religious activity here. Here is the distinction; first, the exorcist does **“a mighty work.”** The effect of his work is both extraordinary and beneficial, he has cast out demons. Second, he has done so **“in his name”** in the name of Jesus. Jesus knows the situations in which His name is used vain and those genuine situations in which His name is used for the benefit of the kingdom of God. It is obvious from Jesus’ comments that this man’s calling upon his name has a ring of authenticity

Application

The disciples are here focussed on tightening the identity boundaries at the expense of focussing on the mission they have been called for. Waging the battle against Satan, demons or unclean spirits is a central theme in today's text. The apostles are being prepared to understand discipleship as humble service rather than as position of power and authority. They drew a tight circle to keep the exorcist out, but Jesus re-draws the circle to include him in. As human beings, we are sometimes particular of identity boundaries that define us and lose sight of the opportunities to evangelize the world. Likewise, Jesus is calling his disciples to embrace a more inclusive vision. This is a gospel for today's church fragmented along many lines; denominational, doctrinal, racial, socio-economic, national, liberal/conservative, charismatic/non-charismatic, and young/elderly. We commit so much energy and resources in tightening our identity boundaries instead of using that energy and resources in fighting the devil. We are always tempted to regard Christians from the other side of the line as inferior that is if we think of them as Christians at all. This is the reason in our church why there is so much emphasis on shared ministry instead of clergy centred ministry. The point here is that, we ordained clergy can be jealous of our prerogatives and dismissive of laypersons that move into areas of ministry usually reserved for clergy. Laypersons serving in official positions can often be equally jealous of their authority. Christ calls us to put aside petty jealousies and to respect the gifts of those who work in his name. However, I am not downplaying that fact that there is a fine line between those who believe differently and those whose beliefs are incompatible with Christian teachings. As the church, this

text is not asking us to turn our backs on the fundamentals of the faith, and not to cast away the basic doctrines in an attempt to accommodate those who believe differently.

What is shared/collaborative/team ministry? It is a way of structuring ministry so that the local church is responsible for establishing priorities for mission and ministry. It is the affirming of the gifts of all the baptised. It is an opportunity for everyone to be involved according to their gifts, time and energy. A growing and evolving way of being church. These are some of the characteristics of a more engaging and mature church. These are the things that Jesus wants his apostles to know before his departure. The beauties of the shared/collaborative/team ministry according to the Joshua Group are:

1. It leads to a shared leadership culture that is open to more varieties of opinions, collaboration, and innovation
2. It helps the pastors prevent burnout by sharing responsibility. This is why sometimes I chose to sit in the congregation while others are ministering to me. It is health for my spiritual life as well.
3. It is key in disciple-making.
4. It creates energy, engagement and fosters relationships in church.
5. It creates maturity and competence among lay leaders and that is helpful in preparation for times of pastoral transition.

May the almighty God help us to embrace the beauty of shared/collaborative and team ministry. This is the most important ingredient of church growth. Amen