



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“IT IS GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE”

Scripture Lessons: Numbers 11:24-30; Mark 9:38-41

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, August 28, 2022
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Mark 9:38-41

³⁸ John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name,^[a] and we tried to stop him because he was not following us.” ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ 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.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Let us pray...

Almighty and everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the mediations of each of our hearts, be pleasing and even joyful in your sight. For you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The Rev, Dr. David Galloway, rector of the Holy Innocents’ Episcopal Church in Atlanta, Georgia, had just finished playing a round of golf with his three best friends in Tyler, Texas.

They had stopped into the 19th Hole, the grill at the Willowbrook Country Club, for some refreshments following their round. He described the room as full of people who were stretching the truth about their great round of golf, of spectacular shots and long puts.

Into that room entered a man who, for the sake of anonymity, has been dubbed Sam. Sam was from Texas Oil Man central casting – he had a red face...he was large, and he was loud.

Apparently, Sam always wanted you to know when he was in the house. He was a backslapping, heehawing fellow both on the golf course and around the town. Funny thing was, nobody wanted to play with him because he was so overbearing / so obnoxious.

One of David’s friends, Dan, had actually felt sorry for Sam and on one occasion, several months earlier, Dan had invited Sam to join their group. For 18 holes Dan had to put up with Sam’s loud-mouthed antics. It was for Dan the most horrible round of golf in his life.

On this day, Sam walked into the 19th Hole with a drink in one hand and a cigar in the other. He came up to David’s table and started talking out loud -- the only volume he had – so loud that the attention of the entire room naturally gravitated to him.

He bellowed at David, “You Episcopalians don’t believe in the Bible, do you?” Rather than take the bait, David just looked at him and smiled, hoping Sam would pass by like an East Texas Thunderstorm.

Sam went on, “David, I want to go to a church that is Bible-believing. Do you understand me? A place where the preacher is not trying to tippy toe around the hard lessons of Jesus, a preacher who will lay it on the line, not try to water down the Gospel. I want a preacher who will be bold and put it out there, the full measure of the Bible, not hold back a

lick. I want a preacher who will not let sinners slide and will call them out by name. I want the full Gospel.”

David heard his own response issue from his lips after taking a long sip from his glass. Granted, it was a kind of response that actually bore witness to Sam’s concern about taking the Bible out of context, but that didn’t stop David from trying to set the record straight.

“You want the full Gospel?” David said. “You mean the part about selling all you have and giving it to the poor?” A pregnant silence fell over the room, after which Sam responded, “Well, not that part!”

The room broke up in laughter, while Sam slunk out of the room as quietly as possible. In the meantime, everyone was high-fiving David for having put Sam in his place. David had slain Goliath once again and all was right with the world.

David went home that night particularly proud of himself and he proceeded to tell the story to his wife. Mary laughed at David’s story with a laugh that David had grown to love over the last 25 years.

But so as to not let him bask in the sunlight too long, Mary asked the evident but avoided question: “So, David, what part of the Gospel do you avoid?” In other words, “David, how are you like Sam?”

You know, far too often we look at other people, other churches perhaps, and we presume, for any number of reasons, that they may not be doing right by God’s Word...oh, they may be doing some things well, but other things seem so far out of bounds that it is disorienting to us.

Maybe we can’t fathom how it is that a preacher on television could spend so much time talking about successful living and prosperity or conversely maybe we struggle to understand how it is that another church presents the Gospel in such a way that it comes across as frightening or judgmental.

On a previous Pulpit Exchange, I partnered with a pastor and friend named Scott Burton. I remember he invited me to read a book that I never got around to reading...I had to look up the title again, and you’ll understand why. It was written by Brian McLaren, and it is entitled:

A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a missional, evangelical, post/protestant, liberal/conservative, mystical/poetic, biblical, charismatic/contemplative, fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, catholic, green, incarnational, depressed - yet hopeful, emergent, unfinished Christian. That’s quite a mouthful.

I feel like I can relate to the title of that book. I shared with our New Member Class yesterday that my grandfather and uncle were Baptist pastors, and, since my mother grew up Baptist and my father grew up at St. John’s Lutheran Church just over on Clifford Street, throughout my childhood it was not uncommon for us to attend churches in those denominations, but we also attended others.

In fact, I was baptized in the Methodist Church. Over the years, I even spent some time in a Catholic school. I spent one year over at Christ our King Stella Marris in Mt. Pleasant...and I think it must have been quite humorous for Father Conner to watch this young man, who was a member of the Second Presbyterian Church, try and negotiate “Confession.”

Most of you know I graduated from First Baptist High School...spent my freshman year at a Presbyterian College.

All this to say, I have come to know, rather personally, that there are a variety of ways for the church to be the church.

I was sharing with our Tuesday Morning Men's Bible Study last week that I am on a Search Committee for our Presbytery which is charged with the task of nominating an Interim General Presbyter following Donnie Wood's retirement.

I went on to tell them that I am hoping we can find a candidate who can keep us between the poles, as it were; someone who can respect those who operate closer to the fringes, but who, all-the-while, can maintain and celebrate that historic core of our identity as Presbyterians - a faithful proclamation of the Gospel, mission, evangelism...oh, there's so much that has contributed to our rich and Godly heritage.

And to be certain, the church must always remember who she is, and to whom she belongs, and whenever she is out-of-step with the heart and mind of Christ, it behooves her to adjust those steps / to reform her ways.

But what of those matters which can be attributed to differences of style or practice or emphasis? I mean, it is one thing to have our own identity, our own heritage, our own ideas about what it means to live as the church, but it is another thing entirely to believe that we have a monopoly on Christ's Church.

At times, even I feel like I'm running to the throne of grace as did that young man in our OT Lesson...the one who knew that permission had not been granted to prophesy and so he ran up to Moses and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." Or, maybe I feel a little more like Aaron, and I take it a bit further..."My, Lord, Moses, stop them."

A little later in our service of worship we will celebrate the Lord's Supper, and you will hear in some form or fashion that "This is the joyful feast of the people of God...and that they shall come from north and south and east and west and sit at table in God's kingdom."

Which is to say that, one day, there will be a heavenly table, and there will be around it people who hail from every brand of Christian church imaginable...and those people will represent large churches and small churches -- maybe no churches at all, save the temple of their faithful heart.

Ah, some will have participated in missions, others in Christian Education...some will have spent their lives in prayer; but all of them -- they will have yielded to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Here in Mark's Gospel, Jesus reminds his disciples not to spend so much time focusing on who is in and who is out. If people confess Jesus' name, and if they do God's will, don't condemn them...commend them.

And this is not an affirmation of a church where anything goes -- that less than sacred place where there is adherence to a truth other than the truth of the Gospel.

No! I think what Jesus is saying here is that we need not be so easily caught up in how someone preaches or their emphasis on this or that...if that's our issue, then we really need to let it go / we need to move on. Jesus put it this way, "Whoever is not against us is for us."

Oh, far more important than pointing out our differences is living our sameness. You see, there is intended to be a oneness in Jesus Christ which holds the entire Body of Christ together...you and me and all of its different parts.

Yet all too often the eye says to the ear, "I have no need of you," and the ear says to the foot, "I have no need of you," and before we know it, the Body of Christ has a hard time hearing and walks with a limp.

Jesus went to great lengths to curb our appetite for pointing out the speck in someone else's eye while failing to notice the log in our own eye...

Jesus talks about this dynamic in other ways as well. In the parable of the weeds among the wheat, we learn that there was sown among the good seed some weeds, and when the plants came up so did the weeds.

The servant said to the master, "Do you want us to go and gather the weeds." "No," the owner said, "for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them."

Now, in its original context, there was a measure of unresponsiveness on the part of the people, and the disciples, who were being sent out into the world / out to the field -- they faced and would face frustration.

Of course, there are limits to parables and allegories, but at least one of the implications seems unavoidable -- leave the weeds alone! They will be dealt with alright, but they will be dealt with by God and in God's good time.

And perhaps it has to do with the fact that we are not as careful as we should be when we are about the task of weeding, but there is also the implication that in our effort to stop the weeds from growing, we might inadvertently do harm to the good crop / to the very people of God as they continue to grow in wisdom and stature and into the fullness that God intends.

The few words that we read this morning from our NT Lesson; they are not the only words that Jesus offers in terms of how to deal with a competitive witness.

Stand firm in the Gospel, for sure -- there is no substitute for the Truth about God -- but both within the church and beyond the church, which I think is also part of the purview of Jesus' words...we must tread people kindly and gently / we must be merciful and gracious, because that is exactly how God in Christ has dealt with us!

That is one of the profound messages of this Sacrament, for it is not only the Lord's Table where we are nourished in the Spirit, but it is also a table which reminds us over and over again of the lengths to which Jesus has gone to pay the wages of sin, which is death!

Instead of saying, "Stop them," Jesus actually became them / he became us; and, in doing so, he redeemed us! In spite of our shortcomings, in spite of our frailties, in spite of all that makes us unworthy...Jesus came and He gave to us living water!

Perhaps that is what he wants us to do...to come to our neighbors -- to love them in their strength and to love them in their weakness -- to be for them and for the world a very living witness / a most receptive and gracious Spirit..."For truly I tell you," Jesus goes on to say, "whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward." Something to think about . . .

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.