

In/Out?
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Mark 9:38-50; James 5:13-20
September 14th
Rally Day

I remember being in middle school. I am standing in line with many other children. Two others in my class are standing in front of us. They begin to call out names. They are choosing sides for kickball. They call out the names of the students who are the tallest, the fastest, and the biggest. Finally, there are only a few of us left, and neither team wants us. There is an IN group, and I'm not in it.

How many of you have had the same experience that I had growing up? In every circumstance in school growing up there was an IN group. It was usually the jocks, or the cheerleaders, or the popular crowd. I was averaged sized, I didn't care about my hair and I didn't wear make up, and I was a nerd. There was an IN group, and I was not in it.

Look around... we are not in High School anymore (most of us). Here in Brodhead, we can't possibly have an in group and an out group? Right now we are sitting in a church. We are all good, God-fearing people. In our congregation here, we don't have an in and an out group do we?

The story that we just heard read from the gospel of Mark is about the disciples. Jesus knows that the end is coming and he is trying to teach his disciples everything he can before he must leave them. So he sits them down... and tells them what it means to be a disciple. What they must do to be a disciple.

I am going to break this passage up into three parts. Jesus tells them; Do not stop other people from finding and following God. Do not stop yourself from following God. And, once you start following God, do not loose your way.

So FIRST; Do not stop other people from finding and following God.

The Disciples see people doing good things, in Jesus' name, but who are not a part of their group. And they get upset. How dare these outsiders use our leader's name to do their work.

If this were reenacted in a movie, I could see 12 men with matching t-shirts. The front has a cool design that says, Jesus Crew. And the back has their names embroidered on it... Disciple number one... Disciple number two... Disciple number three...

Then they see a man who is not wearing a Jesus Crew t-shirt help an old lady cross the street. The disciples approach the man and yell at him, saying, "How dare you help that old lady across the street. Don't you know that you are not allowed to do good things if you are not a member of the Jesus Crew?"

This story may sound silly, but how often in our lives do we do this or see it happen?

Take the fair for example... how many vendors were selling hamburgers? Each vendor might have been upset with the other vendors for selling the same food. Or, one vendor might have been upset with another vendor for using the same cause in order to sell their food.

There is an IN group and an OUT group, but as Ched Meyers, in his book, *Unbinding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* says, "Whenever you want to draw lines in order to mark who is outside the kingdom and who is inside, always remember: JESUS IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LINE! Jesus is always with the outsiders!"

To be a Disciple of Jesus Christ, we as Christians must not stand in other people's way to finding God.

The SECOND thing Jesus tells his disciples about how to be a disciple is, Do not stop yourself from following God. Too often we are the biggest distraction and stumbling block to God.

Jesus said, "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off". When I first read this, I thought, O, Jesus is using a hyperbole again (being over dramatic for a purpose). But the more I read about it the more I realized that Jesus is VERY SERIOUS...no not about cutting off your literal hand... Jesus says, cut off your hand if it causes you to stumble... what he is saying is to cut off, cut out, eliminate the things in your life that cause you to stumble... to stumble or to loose faith.

Many things in the world might cause us to loose faith; war, loss of a loved one, genocide, an illness, depression, loss of a job... But the biggest obstacle to keeping our faith is often OURSELVES! We are too busy... too tired... too mad... The Packer game is too exciting to miss to go to church (go Pack)... Money is too necessary in my life than to take a day off to be with my children... Fishing, hunting, stamp collecting (insert hobby here) is just too fun... My bar buddies would laugh at me if I prayed before I ate my meal...

We, ourselves, are the biggest stumbling blocks to our faith. Sometimes it is not an object that keeps us from God, it is our own attitudes. Our dislikes and hates, our prejudices, our ignorance's, our single-mindedness, our inability to accept others...

Ann Lamont once said, "You have created God in your own image when you are convinced that God hates all the same people you do."

What is the stumbling block in your life?

Jesus is telling us that we should not let ourselves be the thing that keeps us from God. Don't be your own stumbling block.

The **THIRD** thing that Jesus tells his disciples about how to be a disciple is, once you start following God, do not lose your way.

Jesus says, you need to have salt... Wait, what? What does salt have to do with a disciple?

Everyone knows about salt -- we use it every day

- Salt is used in fixing the dye in fabrics like many of your shirts. Without salt, the bright colors that we wear today would quickly wash out of our fabrics. What a dull place the world would be without salt!
- Salt is also used in making leather. Without salt we would not have many of the leather products that we use every day-- like belts.
- Salt is used in the chemical industry to make plastics. Without salt, we might not have many of the toys, tools, and products that we use every day which are made from plastic.
- In the Bible, salt was used in the Temple. Salt had to be added to all offerings brought to the sanctuary. You could not worship God without salt.

Can you imagine eating a hamburger and fries without salt? They would be pretty tasteless, wouldn't they? So what does salt have to do with a disciple?

Here are some ways in which disciples are like salt;

1. Just as salt changes the flavor of the food we eat, disciples are to add "flavor" to the world.
2. Just as salt was used as a preservative in ancient times, disciples are to **PRESERVE SOCIETY** from moral decay.
3. Just as salt makes you thirsty, disciples need to **MAKE PEOPLE THIRSTY** for God
4. Just like salt, disciples may be **SMALL BUT** they are **VERY IMPORTANT**
5. Salt **IS OF NO VALUE IN ISOLATION**. Salt, on its own, is not good for much of anything. It is not like a diamond that is precious for its beauty. Rather, salt is precious

only when you put it with other things. It is great that we are Christians, but we are only something extraordinary when we are in community.

So disciples need to be like salt... but Jesus also says not to lose our way.

Did you know that once you come to church, and are baptized, and tithe you automatically get coated with a sin-protecting barrier and you get put on a road that leads you straight to God... and this road has no detours, no construction, and no exits. So once you're on it, it's a straight path to God... Anybody believe life works that way??

NO... we often lose our way or step off the path for a bit. It's not easy being a Christian.

It's like salt... once it loses its saltiness, or we lose our way, it's hard to get it back. So we need to always try to stay on track and not lose our way.

On this Rally Day... the day we celebrate summer's end and a new, full year at the church. Where everything gears up again. Are you in or out? Does this church have an in group so that everyone else is out? When new people walk into the sanctuary, are they in or out? How can we make people feel like they are in?

As our new year kicks off today, how will we live from here on out? Who will be our in group? Will we have an out group? Who is our church's in group? Will the church have an out group? Remember... WE set the ins and outs of the church... WE decided who will be included and who is left out... WE, by our actions, decided if the person walking into the church is in or out. How will you act? How will we welcome others?

Jesus tells his disciples (and us) that there are three things to remember in being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus tells them; Do not stop other people from finding and following God. Do not stop yourself from following God. And, once you start following God, do not lose your way.

Through prayer, daily devotion, and a never ending attitude of praise toward God, we can be true Christian disciples, and we can help others to find Christ and be disciples too. Amen.