

## September 29, 2024 Sermon Manuscript

### Numbers 11:4-6,10-17,24-29 (NIV)

<sup>4</sup> The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat! <sup>5</sup> We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. <sup>6</sup> But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!”...

<sup>10</sup> Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. <sup>11</sup> He asked the Lord, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? <sup>12</sup> Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors? <sup>13</sup> Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ <sup>14</sup> I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. <sup>15</sup> If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin.”

<sup>16</sup> The Lord said to Moses: “Bring me seventy of Israel’s elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you. <sup>17</sup> I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone...

<sup>24</sup> So Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the tent. <sup>25</sup> Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again.

<sup>26</sup> However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. <sup>27</sup> A young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

<sup>28</sup> Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!”<sup>^</sup>

<sup>29</sup> But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” <sup>30</sup> Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

<sup>^</sup>Greek (LXX) *kolouson autous*, compare Mk 9:38

### Acts 19:11-20 (NIV)

<sup>11</sup> God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, <sup>12</sup> so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

<sup>13</sup> Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” <sup>14</sup> Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. <sup>15</sup> One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?” <sup>16</sup> Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

<sup>17</sup> When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. <sup>18</sup> Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. <sup>19</sup> A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. <sup>20</sup> In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

### Mark 9:38-50 (NIV)

<sup>38</sup> “Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”

<sup>39</sup> “Do not stop him,”<sup>^</sup> Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, <sup>40</sup> for whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup> Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

<sup>42</sup> “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they 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 with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. [<sup>44</sup>]\* <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. [<sup>46</sup>]\* <sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup> where

“the worms that eat them do not die,  
and the fire is not quenched.”

<sup>49</sup> Everyone will be salted with fire.

<sup>50</sup> “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

<sup>^</sup>Greek *me koluete auton*, compare Num 11:28

### **“Do Not Stop Him”** (Num 11:4-6,10-17,24-29, Acts 19:11-20, Mk 9:38-50)

This morning I want to proclaim the encouragement that Christ’s Kingdom is never about God lifting us up over others. Rather, it is about God blessing others *and us* in ways the world *never can*.

For me, my life being husband & parent & priest I fills up my time pretty well, such that I don’t have time for a lot of hobbies. But a few simple pleasures I do afford myself are watching Alabama football,

which went pretty well yesterday (Roll Tide), and I really enjoy music: not playing music - I don't have any instrumental skills like so many of you here - but I really enjoy listening to music. My Apple Music subscription is the best 11 bucks a month I could spend; I use it a ton.

But do any of you remember Napster? Napster was an online music program that came out in 1999 after technology had advanced where you could "rip" songs off of CDs into digital files called MP3s. And Napster was an online music program that allowed people to share these MP3s with other people. Now, this was not exactly legal from a copyright standpoint, but I spent a lot of time downloading music from Napster. But, around this time I also got a CD burner, which allowed you to put these MP3 music files onto CDs. And I was pretty much the first person in my high school class to get a CD burner; my dad had gotten me one of these for Christmas. And so, for a little while there, I became the go-to person for anyone who wanted to burn mixtape CDs of songs. In fact, I can remember our senior year Amanda was the head cheerleader; I wonder how many of y'all knew that about her? So, she came to me and asked me to put together some mixtapes for the cheerleaders to do their dances to. And my collaboration with her for that was perhaps where a bit of a spark between us began to develop: over pirated music and burning CDs. ;)

So, for a little while there, I was the go-to-guy for anyone in our high school who wanted to burn mixtape CDs of songs. So that gave me a little status among my high school peers, which I quite enjoyed. That is, until CD burners became more ubiquitous and other people got them and my status went right back to what it had been.

Can you think of anything that gives *you* status from a worldly standpoint where you would really struggle if it became threatened or undermined, or that you might fiercely protect?

Well, this illustration - of me getting some status and then having it deflate - is a bit of a parallel to what we see going on with the disciples at the opening of our gospel passage from Mark today, albeit on a much more significant level - when the disciples discover a man outside of their group doing works in the name of Jesus to free people from oppression - doing something that the disciples had thought Jesus had only authorized them to do.<sup>1</sup> Back in chapter 6, Jesus had of course commissioned the twelve disciples to do precisely this sort of ministry, but (as Markan scholar Ched Myers explains) the success the disciples had had doing this had now given them a sense of spiritual status and power that they wanted to maintain a monopoly over; they wanted to be the only ones who were doing this sort of compassionate ministry "in Jesus' name". So, John tells Jesus that he and the other disciples "told (this man) to stop" and - here is the reason, the key phrase at the end of verse 38 is - the disciples had told this man to stop because he was (quote) "not one of us".

So, what this brings up is the posture we might take toward other Christian Churches (whether others local churches or larger denominations and traditions).<sup>2</sup> Now, hopefully each of you are here at St Matthias in the Anglican tradition because you've discerned this is the best place for you to walk out your journey as a follower of Jesus. But there can be a temptation to take that a step further into a posture of judgment toward other Churches outside of our tradition to the neglect of acknowledging and even celebrating the ways God has moved and is moving in some of these other contexts, or even jealousy and cynicism toward kingdom fruit those ministries may bear. And this is the exact posture - of judgment, jealousy, and cynicism - that Jesus' disciples are taking toward this other man doing powerful works in Jesus' name.

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<sup>1</sup> Last week our gospel passage featured the Disciples arguing over who is the greatest, and today our Gospel passage picks up immediately after that in Mark chapter 9, with the disciple John disclosing to Jesus that someone was driving out demons in Jesus name and so he and the other disciples "told him to stop". Chapter 9 of Mark has not featured the disciples' best moments.

<sup>2</sup> The fancy word for relationships among different Christian Churches and Traditions is Ecumenism.

But Jesus does not approve of this posture. Instead, He corrects the disciples, saying,<sup>39</sup> “Do not stop him. For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me,<sup>40</sup> for whoever is not against us is for us.” And with these words of correction - “Do not stop Him” - Jesus is harkening directly back to the episode from our First Reading from the Book of Numbers.

There, Moses had distributed the burden of ministering by delegating to God’s people. In verse 17 God had told Moses, “<sup>17</sup> I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone...” So, Moses gathered seventy elders and the power of God’s Spirit rested on them. But two men, Eldad & Medad were supposed to be there for this commissioning-of-sorts, but they had failed to make it. And yet, after this God ministered through them anyway, in just the way He had ministered through the seventy. Well, when Joshua heard of this, he said, “Moses...stop them!” But Moses corrects him. Moses is like, “No... the more people who are ministering in the Lord the better!!” There is no good in jealousy or territorialism if God is ministering through these men; the more the merrier!

So, what Jesus says to His disciples in Mark is in line with Moses’ point. As you can see in the footnote,<sup>3</sup> what Jesus says to the disciples is the exact *opposite* in the Greek of what Joshua had said to Moses. Joshua said, “Moses, stop Him!” and Jesus tells the disciples, “Do not stop Him!”<sup>4</sup> And, Like Moses, Jesus’ point is that if this man is operating in Jesus’ power to do what Christ’s kingdom is all about, then hallelujah! Christ’s Kingdom is never about God lifting us up over others. Rather, it is about God blessing others *and us* in ways the world - and its grasping for status and power - *never can*. #

Now, it’s interesting this phrase “in Jesus’ name” that comes up three times in these first four verses of our Mark passage. I want to say a few words about this, because it seems to be commonly misunderstood and misused. Over the centuries in the Church, it has been common for Christians to invoke Jesus’ name in prayer in a way that - if we’re honest - is often thought of as something like a magical incantation that gives our prayers some extra *oomph*. And for Christians today, this misunderstanding of this - of asking for things “in Jesus’ name” being a way to add special power to prayers - I think this largely comes from a misunderstanding of what Jesus teaches in John’s gospel, where *three different times* Jesus says something like “ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”<sup>5</sup> Well, that’s a pretty big promise; so it’s easy to get in the mindset that when we pray for anything, if we invoke or close with the name of Jesus, that could put it over the top, increasing the likelihood we’ll get what we want, increasing the likelihood we’ll get what we want.

And yet, I wonder how many times have you or I have asked for something in Jesus’ name *and it didn’t happen*? Thousands? Tens-of-thousands? And these experiences can leave us wondering,

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<sup>3</sup> The Septuagint (LXX), which was widely in use in Jesus’ day.

<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, Jesus’ Hebrew name Yeshua, the same as Joshua. The Hebrew for Joshua is Yeshua, which was Jesus’ name in Hebrew. Jesus’ name in Hebrew was really Joshua; we’ve just translated Jesus’ name from the Greek version of it, Iesous, because our New Testament is originally in Ancient Greek.

<sup>5</sup> **John 14:13-14**

(Jesus said,) “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

**John 15:16**

(Jesus said,) “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

**John 16:23-24**

(Jesus said.)<sup>23</sup> In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.<sup>24</sup> Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

“What gives?” But the fact that all us have experienced this countless times - that saying “in Jesus’ name” in a prayer - doesn’t necessarily ensure that what we’re asking for will happen, this gives us a hint that Jesus meant something else when He taught with those teachings in John.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the clearest example we have from scripture of someone using Jesus’ name in this way is found in our passage from Acts 19, which I chose to include as our Second Reading today, where the Seven sons of Sceva invoke the name of Jesus as a magical incantation to get God to do what they want Him to do. They were attempting to harness the power of God to do powerful works for their own profit, note because they actually cared about people being oppressed. And since this *motivation* is not consistent with God’s heart & will, they are unsuccessful to say the least.

So, different from how the Sons of Sceva used “in Jesus’ name” as an incantation, what it seems to have meant in the ancient context for this man in Acts to do powerful works “in Jesus name” was that he discerned each of these works were something God wanted to do through Him,<sup>7</sup> but then he *gave Jesus the credit* for the miracle; he wanted the person being helped = and those around - to know by what power he was doing what he was sure was God’s will for him to do.<sup>8</sup>

Now, this isn’t to say that we shouldn’t pray “in Jesus’ name”, not at all! Of course we should! But when we do so, it is not about giving our prayers more power or oomph. Rather, it’s about acknowledging that what we are praying for is something that we cannot make happen, that we need the Spirit of Christ to move, but also submitting to His will, but that His will is always best (His ways are higher than our ways). #

By the way, when we baptize Caleb here in a bit, we’re going to do so in the name of - not just Jesus, but - the Trinity: “In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” But again, this is nothing like a magic incantation; rather, we’ll be acknowledging that Caleb has entered into relationship with God through a way only made possible by the salvific work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But, back to this man in Mark, what it means that he was ministering in Jesus’ name is that He was acknowledging before God and those He was helping that it was only by the power of Christ that he was doing these things. And *the reason it worked* was because, unlike the Sons of Sceva, his motivation was consistent with the aim of Christ Kingdom - a genuine desire to free the oppressed - *AND* because these miracles were a way the Lord wanted to work through this man, not unlike Eldad and Medad. Christ’s Kingdom is never about God lifting us up over others. Rather, it is about God blessing others *and us* in ways the world *never* can.

So Jesus’ call to us in these *first few verses* is to look for the good in other churches & traditions, to look for what we can affirm is of the work of Christ’s kingdom (bringing people into greater spiritual, emotional, or material freedom). And I was personally challenged by this *just yesterday* when I attended a funeral at another local. This is a church from a tradition where I would probably disagree quite a bit with some of what they teach and the postures they encourage toward the world. But, I tell you what, they *are trying* to follow Jesus faithfully, and the person whose life they celebrated has to be one of the most godly servants I’ve ever met in my life! So, despite their spiritual blindspots, the ministry of Christ’s kingdom is undoubtedly coming through some of what they do, just like I hope that despite my

<sup>6</sup> New Testament scholar Craig Keener teaches: “In this context (of John 14) ‘name’ might mean something like: those who seek his honor and speak accurately for him, who are genuinely his authorized representatives. Nothing could be further from the pagan magical use of names that sought to manipulate spiritual forces for one’s own ends.”

<sup>7</sup> Likely very similar to when Jesus explained in John 5:19: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Acts 3:6 - “Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’” As Craig Keener explains, “‘In the name of Jesus Christ’ here probably means ‘acting as His representative (I say to you)’ or ‘Jesus cures you’ (Acts 3:16, 40:10-12, 9:34)... It credits Jesus exclusively with the honor of healing (as in 3:12-16).”

blindspots and our blindspots, the ministry of Christ's Kingdom would come through us. And I trust that it is, because the Holy Spirit is just that great!

Although, I would be remiss if I didn't say that harm - even great harm - can and has been done in and through God's church, because the Church is made of sinners. So next week we're going to talk about the second half of this passage, which addresses that: on the inevitable potential for bad inside the Church and the importance of it being taken seriously. But my encouragement for *today* is that Christ's Kingdom is never about God lifting us up over others. Rather, it is about God blessing others *and us* in ways the world *never* can.

So Jesus is inviting His disciples and us to look for the good in other churches & traditions, to look for what we can affirm that is of the work of Christ's kingdom (bringing people into greater spiritual, emotional, or material freedom). But Jesus' other intention in these first four verses - which is all we're going to cover today - His other intention is to correct their completely arrogant and misguided belief that because God has done some mighty works through them that they have somehow arrived spiritually and will only be ministering *to* people from now on. This is Jesus' point as He continues in verse 41, saying, "41 Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward." With the disciples thinking their status and achievements mean their life in Christ moving forward will only be ministering *love and compassion to others*, Jesus is saying, "Oh no-no-no." He's saying, "You guys are still going to continue needing to receive love and compassion *from others*, not least metaphorically this cup of water: spiritually & emotionally. And that need for God's ministry *to us* through others in the body of Christ will never end, because none of us will ever arrive spiritually on this side of glory. The kingdom life - the eternal way of living - that Christ invites us into can never be just a one way street of us seeking to love and bless others. It always necessitates that we continue to receive blessing from the love of others - and often in unexpected ways, orchestrated by God - because following Jesus is a journey of giving *grace and receiving it* that will continue til our dying breath. Christ's Kingdom is never about God lifting us up over others. Rather, it is about God blessing others *and us* in ways the world *never* can.

As followers of Jesus, we are each on a journey where we need one another. And so, while we've said that Caleb's baptism today signifies the reality of his individual relationship with God through Christ, his submission to baptism is also into >this< community of the Body of Christ. The rite baptism marks a recognition that the person being baptized needs us, but that we also need him (or her). [We need one another, and today Caleb is formalizing a relationship with all of us of mutual blessing.]

And that Jesus says this to His disciples - who will be leaders in the Church - is significant, because leaders in the Church need other believers just as much as anyone. As a priest and rector here, I do have an office and authority to teach the word and sacraments, but despite that all of us are really following Jesus side-by-side one another. And I am just as much in need of love and help from other believers as anyone here!!! So, today Caleb is making clear in baptism that He is my brother in christ. Lord willing, I would be a blessing to Caleb, but he could just as likely be a blessing to me. I can say that *already*, in the short time I've known him, his faith has been an encouragement to me. [This guy's got some faith!]

So, let's get to his baptism.

In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, by which I mean that apart from Him the words I've spoken here this morning are nothing, but I (do) ask that God would use them to bring about even more of His Kingdom into our lives.

Amen.

