

# Season after PENTECOST

## Prayer

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

### Collect of the Day

Everlasting Father, source of every blessing, mercifully direct and govern us by Your Holy Spirit that we may complete the works You have prepared for us to do; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### Scripture Readings

Psalm 104:27-35

(antiphon v. 24)

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

James 5:(1-12) 13-20

Mark 9:38-50

### Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 505

Other Hymns – 501 (OT), 839 (E),

718 (G), 850 (G), 730

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, help Your children to rejoice in the work of the Spirit wherever He pours out His gifts, giving all the glory to You and Your boundless love. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

King of glory, continue to raise up those who assist Your ministers in bearing the burden of caring for Your people with their prayers, their service and their support. Enable all ministers of the Word to proclaim Your Law and promises with faithfulness and zeal. Put an end to all grumbling against one another, and help us remember that the Judge is standing at the door. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Remember in mercy all who have strayed from the life of Your Church and Your truth, and use us to bring them back to You. Give us a godly fear of the grave danger of causing Your little ones, by our words or deeds, to stumble and fall from You. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

To Your kindness we commend all who have been entrusted with public service in our land. Keep them ever mindful that they will give account to You. Protect them from every impulse to self-service and to live in luxury or self-indulgence. Fill them with Your wisdom, and make them a blessing to our people. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Father of all compassion, You call us to patient waiting in our lives until the coming of our Lord, when we know You will restore us fully. Bless those who pass through trying and difficult times [especially Your servants \_\_\_\_\_] with steadfast faith in Your mercy and compassion and a cheerful hope for their future. Bless all ministry to the sick or suffering in Your name. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Merciful Master, as Your Son urges us to enter the Kingdom of Life, we thus come to His Table today. We pray that You would renew in us a hearty desire for life with You, receiving in faith our Saviour's body and blood as the guarantee and pledge of eternal life, that we may leave this place as witnesses to the joy of sin's forgiveness and death's defeat. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of life, receive our thanks on this day for all Your servants who finished their course in faith and now rest from their labours. Bring us to share with them Your unending life on the day of the Saviour's appearing. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

# *Season after* **PENTECOST SERMON**

**EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (Proper 21)  
September 26, 2021**

**Sermon Text: Mark 9:38-50**

*‘Worth Your Salt’*

Every now and then we come across words from the Scriptures that are difficult to hear and understand . . . and which can easily be misunderstood. Today’s Gospel Reading contains some of the more difficult words that Jesus speaks. How do we understand someone giving us a drink of water, or whether or not to cut off a part of our body, or the metaphor of being salted with fire? What do these difficult words say to us about our salvation in Jesus and love for others? This morning we will dig into these words of Jesus and discover just what He is trying to say to us.

The first encounter we have in the Gospel Reading is with the disciples having a hard time seeing someone outside of their band of twelve casting out demons in His name. This encounter directly follows last week’s Gospel Reading when the disciples were arguing about who is the greatest. Jesus addressed this issue by placing a small child into their midst . . . and who would have had little status or standing in the ancient world. To be great, Jesus said, is one who serves in humility and love, and one who receives such a child is receiving Jesus and the Father.

The disciples, however, are still struggling with this . . . just as we do today. In today’s Gospel they are concerned with an outsider serving Jesus. The in-group versus the out-group. If you are part of the in-group, then you are accepted; but if not, then you cannot be a part of the group. This is what is going on in the Old Testament Reading with Eldad and Medad “prophesying” in the camp and with Joshua being concerned about it. Seventy men were gathered into Moses’ presence and the Spirit fell upon them – the insiders; but two others, Eldad and Medad, remained in the camp – the outsiders; and yet, they were found to be prophesying as well. And how did Moses reply? “Are you jealous for my sake?”

Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them." And Jesus' response to the disciple John's concern is similar with what Moses said to Joshua.

What's the point? Just this: God's people must allow God to do His work where and when it pleases Him. He might, after all, put His Spirit on those regarded by us to be outsiders, just as was the case with Eldad and Medad and with the person casting out demons in the name of Jesus. Jesus puts it this way, "For the one who is not against us is for us." There is no insider/outsider distinction in Christ's kingdom . . . as difficult as that may be for us to grasp and accept. Regardless of your denominational ties, or how we might think things should be and are to be done in the church . . . God's mighty works are done according to His will, not our will . . . done through His people in the name of Jesus. Oh, such might make us feel defensive or protective, but it actually demonstrates that we who are followers of Christ have many different gifts and abilities and that God works through them all for the sake of extending His kingdom in the hearts of people.

Jesus says that the one who is kind to you, such as giving you a cup of water because you bear "the name of Christ" will not lose his reward. In other words, faith in Jesus responds in love and good works to your neighbour. An act of kindness through you is in fact an act of kindness done by Christ himself.

Now, comes the part of the Gospel Reading that is probably one of the most difficult to hear. It tends to shock those who are hearing it and can easily be misunderstood. This is the part about stumbling, where Jesus tells us to cut off our hand or foot or pluck out an eye or tie a giant millstone around your neck because that would be better than causing someone to fall away from the faith. Are we really supposed to literally do all that? Certainly not! However, Jesus is teaching us the seriousness of causing someone to stumble and fall away from the faith . . . teaching us to turn away from trusting in yourself and therefore turning away from Him.

The question really isn't about hands, feet, or eyes causing us to fall away; but, rather, the deeper question of sin. A few chapters earlier here in Mark's Gospel, Jesus says, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." Jesus

doesn't anyone to stumble, to fall into sin . . . including you! And so, He warns us about it – not to cause others to stumble or even you to cause yourself to stumble. Remember your evil heart and where it can lead you! The real threat to being a follower of Christ lies, not outside you, but within you. And so, turn away from it, lay it at the foot of the cross in repentance and receive the new person Jesus has made you at your baptism into His death and resurrection.

And now we come to one of the most difficult teachings of Jesus. It's difficult because the metaphor or figure of speech could refer to any of the ancient uses of salt – seasoning food, preserving, an agent to destroy the fertility of the land, an addition to offerings or incense. If we simply take Jesus' words at face value – “Everyone will be salted with fire,” it points to the salt as an agent to destroy. We don't often think of salt in this way. You might, for example, use a salt solution suggested on the internet to get rid of dandelions in your lawn; and while it will get rid of the dandelions, it will also do the same to the grass around them. Too much salt in your soil kills everything.

“For everyone will be salted with fire,” Jesus says. “Salt is good but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.” To be sure, we know on the Last Day that God will indeed purge away everything that is against His kingdom. But what should we make about having salt in ourselves, today? What is it that needs the purging power of salt?

If we go back to what Jesus said about ‘cutting off hands and feet’ and the deeper issue of sin within the heart, then we begin to understand the metaphor of salt. Our sin has been purged away by the cleansing power of Jesus Christ. The forgiveness he earned for us with His perfect life and death has brought peace to us. His resurrection has given us the victory of His grace and mercy. This has made us people who have salt within us. You and me, and all who believe in Jesus as their Saviour from sin, have our being now in Him. Or, if you use another metaphor from Paul – we have been built on the foundation of Christ Himself.

Through faith and repentance we lay our sinful hearts at the foot of Christ's cross and are cleansed of our sins. This is who we are – people of repentance, of faith and trust in Jesus. We have been made into His people and so we are people of salt and thus people of peace. We have been invited by Jesus himself to have peace with each other because we have the salt of

His victory within us. We are led by him to confess, forgive, bring a “cup of water” to others, and share the peace of Christ with all.

Yes, this salt is different. This salt is you! You, Jesus says, are good – because you are in Him. You are the ones who work for God’s kingdom by sharing the love of Christ in your life with others. You are worth so much to God that He sees those who care for you as caring for Christ Himself. You are worth so much to God that He doesn’t want anything or anyone, including your own sinful heart, to cause you to stumble and fall away from Him. You are worth so much to God that He deems you worth every grain of salt you have. In Jesus, you are worth your salt. Amen.