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**Sermon – 19<sup>th</sup> Pentecost**  
**Mark 9:38-50**  
**September 30, 2018**

**“Bottled Water and Cherry Popsicles”**

In late June of 2011 the Mouse River in Minot, North Dakota flooded. My family was among the unlucky 4,000 or so homeowners that got water. After it receded, we went back to begin what they called “mucking out”. One evening I was walking pieces of my house to the curb when a car pulled up and a guy got out. He didn’t look official - no FEMA badge or anything, and was hesitant at first, only saying hi and that he lived on “North Hill” – which along with “South Hill” formed the two high ridges of the Mouse River Valley.

Anyway, he didn’t flood – that’s the point, and I guess he felt bad about it. So, he grabbed a couple of coolers from his garage, went to the store, bought some bottled water and popsicles, and came down to the valley to see if anyone was thirsty. He and I stood among piles of flood debris on a muggy July night and had a bottle of slightly cool water and a soft cherry Popsicle. He admitted it was all he could think of on short notice – he didn’t really know what else flooded homeowners needed. I told him it hit the spot. As he got ready to leave he said if I wanted him to take my empty plastic bottle, Popsicle stick and wrapper and throw it away when he got home. I said I didn’t think anyone would mind if just this once we tossed them into the soaked sheet rock and kitchen cabinets on both curbs! “*Yeah, I suppose not*” he said.

I didn’t get his name, didn’t catch what he did for a living; and whether he was Lutheran or not was the furthest thing from my mind! I did eventually have a bunch of Lutherans come and tear out the main floor so the house could start to dry, three former members of my congregation who’d converted to Catholicism help with the basement, and a bunch of Southern Baptists remove the furnace, water heater and duct work and apply some sort of de-contaminate over the whole house I kid you not one stud at a time. If they hadn’t got there that week a team of Mormons were going to come the next. ‘*Teacher, we saw someone doing a good work in your name...but he was not one of us.*’ Oh my!

It’s said in times of crisis the best comes out of people – or should. It’s said kindness knows no creed – or at the very least shouldn’t be withheld because of it. Both statements, if true, arise out of what we’d call our “common humanity.” Some folks think “common humanity” blurs the lines between distinctly different religious traditions. Well and good, we are the body of Christ and ought to make sure we remain true to our beliefs. But that means taking seriously some things about Christ. First, the Bible is a story of our common humanity and how God intends to “mend the fences”, to say the least between us all. Second, God chose to do the mending through Jesus, who in our lesson today seems uninterested in “us” and “them” arguments.

God’s word from New Testament Mark and Old Testament Numbers both expose our human tendency to segregate ourselves. Joshua was alarmed about a couple of prophets who ‘*were not among us.*’ The disciples of Jesus can’t have Mark chapter nine soon enough – now trying to stop works of mercy by a man “*who was not one of us.*” Both stories force the question - just who are “us?” Who was Israel – who is the church?

In a document called the Augsburg Confession of 1530, an old but wonderful expression of the faith of the Bible, it says the Holy Spirit “*works faith when and where he pleases in those who hear the gospel.*” God is free and at work constantly – despite appearances to the contrary in this and every age. Moses got his much needed help - 70 prophets worth - but longed that every Israelite be ready to speak up for God. Jesus simply said; “*whoever is not against us is for us.*”

God is free in every way - but chooses to save *us* and bless *us* in a particular way - through Christ, whom the gospel presents *to us* – *but always for “them”* – that is for the sake of world. Philippians 2:10-11 says “*at the name of Jesus... every knee will bow, and every tongue confesses that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” Colossians 3:17 says; *whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the Father through him.*” One day everyone will acknowledge Jesus as Lord – that is a plain truth. You know him now however – he’s called you by name; you have assurance of your salvation; and you’ve no need to be concerned about anything other than how you’ll live because of the grace you’ve been shown. The ebbs and flows of things in this life pale in comparison to the exultation of being a Christian.

The prophets Joshua complained had missed out on the day’s large group meeting had not been missed by the Spirit of God. It’s entirely unclear who gave ‘someone’ the power to drive out a demon in our lesson from Mark. But it was crystal clear that was the very sort of thing Jesus had been doing. So, hello, what’s the problem? I know we tend to discount stories of demons today, but don’t tell me (or Jesus) the spirit of divisiveness that plagues our world, our headlong and headstrong convictions that such can be solved by courts or legislatures, our conflicts between “*us’ and thems*” all over where few know why their fighting nor can say how they’d be better off if they win isn’t of the same stripe.

Amazing then that Jesus invites us to try “little graces” - cups of cold water - or cherry popsicles. Perhaps this “common humanity” is not so godless a notion as some might fear. Our Lord didn’t track down the man doing the miracle and ask him his doctrine of salvation. Instead he said his actions conveyed one thing – God is with us. Apparently the water is the key... the cup holder isn’t. Calvary’s mission of “*sharing the life changing message of Jesus Christ*” will happen then every time of this corner of the kingdom of God it might simply be said...look what those people do... in the name that is above all names. AMEN