



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

SERMON - 17TH PENTECOST MARK 9:30-37 (38-40)

SEPTEMBER 19, 2021

"IS HE ONE OF OURS?"

In an episode of the Andy Griffith show entitled "*Mountain Wedding*", actor Denver Pyle plays a rugged old mountain man named Briscoe Darling. Mr. Darling has a bit of problem on his hands in the form of a looney, rambunctious neighbor named Ernest T. Bass and he wants Sheriff Andy to come out and tend to it. In that TV series, there was always the issue of Deputy Barney Fife—whose "by the book" demeanor and rhetoric—sort of confused Mr. Darling, whose ways and surroundings made Mayberry, North Carolina seem positively cosmopolitan. Exasperated with Deputy Fife, he turns to Sheriff Andy and says, "*is he one of ours?*"

Is he one of ours? crossed the minds of our Lord's disciples in our lesson today. Someone was driving out demons in Jesus' name, but they were not a member of the inner circle. What to do? We might be tempted to dismiss this episode as one more example of the disciple's spiritual myopia - their inability to "see" the kingdom of God, or as it were the forest for the trees. Tempted ... if it were not so common for us to fail our eye exams that is.

What are the essentials for belief and conduct of the follower of Christ? In what sorts of activities should the church engage and what should it avoid? Or as Ecclesiastes 3:5 puts it "*to everything there is a season ... a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.*"

This calls for wisdom in the church - and patience as we discern mission and ministry and how to calibrate what change is needed and what should be avoided. Our Lord Jesus is not surprisingly, decisive in his response. "*Don't stop them ... whoever is not against us is for us.*" Sometimes the simplest answer is the best, eh? Not for one minute am I retreating from the accepted tenets of our faith - the necessity and sufficiency of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Bible as God's word and final authority in all matters of faith and life, the church as the provisional sign and rule of Christ on earth... the imperative of our Lord to believe and be baptized... the necessity of personal self-examination and repentance for the forgiveness of sin. The list of "marks of the Christian" could go on.

But we've no luxury these days in the church and perhaps no warrant from our Lord to quibble about who is one of us, and who isn't. Believers of the Lord Jesus ought to know and hold dearly the doctrines of the church and strive for consistency between inner conviction and outward behavior. We all must do that. But what to do about those for whom we are not sure? Who may, in ways we don't recognize or approve, are nonetheless "casting out demons" in Jesus' name? Let me give an example. I recently read a blog-post titled "Pray for Kanye." I suspect a good share of you in this room aren't quite sure who that is. It's Kanye West - a rap music artist of no little renown - in fact his "renown" was at one time about the only thing Kanye seemed to care about.

For some Kanye was best known as Mr. Kim Kardashian-the reality TV star. Talk about a house that couldn't possibly have enough mirrors! Mr. West's career was built on his talent as a singer but also his often noxious, vulgar songs. I was not a fan, let's put it that way, but then my tastes in popular culture tend to run more along the lines of the Andy Griffith Show! That's the way of the world it seems. But in October 2019, Kanye released an album titled "Jesus is King." And since then he has been the subject of endless praise, criticism and skepticism. "*Is he one of ours?*" I don't know - his heart is his and as he now confesses - Jesus lives in it.

I guess that will have to be good enough. My point is that Kanye West does not fit the mold and that makes folks who supposedly do - take me for instance, a little squeamish. So, I take heart that once again, I have God's word and the example of the disciple's own faith and doubts to school me, test me, refine me.

In the title track of his 2019 album "Jesus is King", Kanye West says (in reference to himself) the following;

Change, he ain't really different, He ain't even try to get permission. Ask for advice and they dissed him ... What have you been hearing from the Christians ...they'll be the first to judge me, make it feel like nobody loves me ... only if they knew what I knew, uh, I was never new 'till I knew of the true and living God .. The true and living God. Somebody pray for me."

"Is he one of ours?" How many criteria would we apply and what would they be - what would our "sources" be? Our Lord was succinct in his teachings - the church considerably more voluminous in ours - especially when and where we allow them to get tangled up with the culture. I offer two of our Lord's teachings... first from Mark 4:24 - *"Consider carefully what you hear ... with the measure you use it will be used against you"* and from today's lesson these ... *"whoever is not against us is for us, and "whoever welcomes one of these little children in name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."*

As he himself asked ... pray for Kanye. It may be that he is driving more than his fame with his new faith. It may be he is reaching an audience for Jesus' few, if any, in the room who would even get a word in edgewise. But pray for him too! No one dislikes and yearns to derail a new believer more than the great "dis-believer" Satan. And in the places the likes of Kanye West runs, Satan has lots of allies - but a believer, in turn, has lots of opportunities. And pray that the we in church will learn from our Lord that whoever is not against us (even if they are not much like us, or always agree with us), if the name of Jesus be on their lips is one of us - a brother or sister in Christ. Serving - *"working out our salvation with fear and trembling" as Philippians 2:12 says, but working it out under the lavish love and grace of the one who was so eager to save, and who, on the cross, made you one of his.*

To Him be the glory.

Amen.