



The Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
September 30, 2018

## We're Getting Past All That...

### MARK 9: 38-50

---

“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.”

“Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. 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.

“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. 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. 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.

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, where

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

Everyone will be salted with fire.

“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.”

### SERMON

---

I DROPPED BY TO SEE MY LUTHERAN PASTOR FRIEND, MIKE ROBINSON, A COUPLE WEEKS AGO. HE'S PASTOR AT ST. JOHN'S, PERRYVILLE.

AMONG OTHER THINGS, WE SPEAK ABOUT THE GRAND JURY REPORT AND MIKE TELLS ME, “I'M NO LONGER WEARING MY CLERICAL COLLAR AT WORSHIP.” HE EXPLAINS, “THE CLERICAL COLLAR IS MEANT TO BE A PUBLIC PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL, BUT NOW MOST PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH LOOK AT IT WITH DISGUST AND SUSPICION.”

THIS STRIKES ME AS BOTH A SAD AND POWERFUL STATEMENT.

BUT IT MUST HAVE BEEN IN THE BACK OF MY MIND LAST WEEKEND WHEN DEB, LAYNIE, MY MOTHER-IN-LAW, AND I WENT TO A BIG FAMILY WEDDING. DEB'S COUSIN'S DAUGHTER WAS MARRYING THE SON OF A DENTIST, SO IT WAS A BIG SHINDIG—250 PEOPLE AT A SIT-DOWN DINNER AT THE AIRPORT SHERATON WHERE I WAS TO OFFER THE PRAYER BEFORE THE MEAL.



The Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
September 30, 2018

ARRIVING AT THE COCKTAIL HOUR, A WAITRESS APPROACHES ME, "WOULD YOU LIKE SOME BRUSCHETTA, FATHER?" I HAVE ON MY CLERICAL COLLAR BECAUSE I AM COMING TO THE RECEPTION FROM A WEDDING I DID IN THE AFTERNOON.

SHE EITHER IS MISTAKING ME FOR A CATHOLIC PRIEST OR I HAVE RUN INTO A LONG-LOST DAUGHTER.

I REPLY, "NO THANK YOU AND I'M NOT A FATHER." POINTING TO MY WIFE, "IF I WERE, YOU MIGHT WONDER WHO THIS GOOD-LOOKING WOMAN IS NEXT TO ME."

BUT IT MAKES ME UNCOMFORTABLE. I WONDER, "HOW MANY PEOPLE HERE THINK I AM A ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIEST?"

I HAVE ALREADY THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT I MIGHT SAY PRIOR TO OFFERING THE DINNER PRAYER, BUT HER COMMENT SOLIDIFIES MY CONVICTION.

SO, AFTER BEING INTRODUCED, I SAY WITH SOME LEVITY IN MY VOICE, "GIVEN THE GRAND JURY REPORT, I JUST WANT TO CLARIFY THAT I'M A LUTHERAN PASTOR."

THERE IS SOME APPLAUSE. EVERYONE UNDER ABOUT THIRTY-FIVE LAUGHS HARD. AND THERE IS SOME BOOING.

I PRAY AND SIT DOWN.

LATER, LAYNIE WANTS A GIN-AND-TONIC AND DEB SOME TONIC WATER, SO I HEAD TO THE LINE IN FRONT OF THE BAR.

A WOMAN COMES UP TO ME AND ASKS, "HOW ARE YOU CONNECTED TO THE WEDDING?"

I TELL HER THAT THE FATHER AND UNCLE OF THE BRIDE ARE MY WIFE'S COUSINS.

SHE NODS AND SAYS, "I REALLY LIKE MY PRIEST. AND THE CHURCH IS WORKING TO GET PAST ALL THAT. SO, I DON'T LIKE WHAT YOU SAID."

I SAY, "OKAY." AND SHE WALKS AWAY...

OH, I FAILED TO MENTION, SHE IS RELATED TO THE FAMILY ON THE CATHOLIC SIDE. THE SISTER OF DEB'S COUSIN'S WIFE.

I SURE KNOW HOW TO STEP IN IT.

NOW SHE HAS EVERY RIGHT TO HER POINT OF VIEW. AND EVERY STORY HAS TWO SIDES. BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE BOTH SIDES RIGHT AND TRUE.



The Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
September 30, 2018

HER COMMENT, “WE’RE GETTING PAST ALL THAT,” STICKS IN MY CRAW AND, AS THE WEEK GOES BY, I BECOME ANGRY.

THIS IS A FEW WEEKS AFTER THE GRAND JURY REPORT. AT LEAST 300 PRIESTS SEXUALLY ABUSING OVER 1000 CHILDREN AND “WE’RE GETTING PAST ALL THAT??!!”

PRIESTS, WHO GIVE CROSSES TO LITTLE BOYS TO WEAR AROUND THEIR NECKS, SO OTHER PREDATORY PRIESTS CAN READILY IDENTIFY THEM WHEN THEY MOVE TO THESE CHILDREN’S PARISHES.

“WE’RE GETTING PAST ALL THAT?”

CHILDREN, NOW ADULTS, FOREVER SCARRED, SOME COMMITTING SUICIDE, SOME IN THERAPY FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES, MANY UNABLE TO HAVE ANY KIND OF FUNCTIONAL LIFE. MOST WITH NO BETTER THAN A DEEPLY CONFUSED AND CONFLICTED SPIRITUAL LIFE.

BUT “WE’RE GETTING PAST ALL THAT.”

I GUESS I AM SUPPOSED TO BE IMPRESSED THAT BISHOP ZUBIK HOLDS A HOLY HOUR OF REPENTANCE THIS PAST WEEK ATTENDED BY 200 CATHOLIC FAITHFUL?

AM I NOW EXPECTED TO JOIN IN AND SAY, “WE’RE GETTING PAST ALL THAT?”

ONE REPORT SUGGESTS THAT, FOR DECADES, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS ATTRACTED NARCISSISTIC MEN, ATTRACTED BY LUXURIOUS RECTORIES, ADORATION BY THE LAITY, AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE FREE REIN IN PARISHES TO PURSUE THEIR DISTORTED SEXUAL URGES, ALL THE WHILE PROTECTED BY A POWERFUL, INBRED RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY.

THIS WEEK, A STUDY OF PRIESTS AND DEACONS IN THE GERMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH REVEALED THAT 1,670 OF THEM HAD ABUSED 3,677 CHILDREN.

BUT “WE’RE GETTING PAST ALL THAT.” REALLY?

HOW ABOUT RE-THINKING CELIBACY? HOW ABOUT ORDAINING WOMEN? HOW ABOUT DISMANTLING A CORRUPT HIERARCHY? HOW ABOUT STOPPING YOUR WHINING ABOUT HOW PAYING OUT MILLIONS TO SURVIVORS MIGHT BANKRUPT CATHOLIC DIOCESES?

HOW ABOUT LISTENING TO YOUR PURPORTED SAVIOR?

“IF ANYONE CAUSES ONES 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.”



**The Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
September 30, 2018**

CONSERVATIVELY SPEAKING, A MILLSTONE WEIGHS FIFTEEN HUNDRED POUNDS. THREE-QUARTERS OF A TON.

FOLLOWING JESUS' FORMULA, I MIGHT RE-WORK AN OLD JOKE, "WHAT DO YOU CALL THREE HUNDRED PRIESTS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA?"  
"A GOOD START."

BUT "WE'RE GETTING PAST ALL THAT." GETTING PAST WHAT EXACTLY??!!

I WAS MARRIED SEVENTEEN YEARS TO MY FIRST WIFE BEFORE DIVORCING. WE RAISED TWO SONS TOGETHER. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GET PAST SEVENTEEN YEARS OF MY LIFE? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GET PAST A FAMILY NO LONGER TOGETHER? HOW DO I GET PAST A SON WHO IS STILL ANGRY WITH ME FOR DIVORCING HIS MOTHER? PRETEND NONE OF THIS HAPPENED?

HOW DOES ONE "GET PAST" THE DEATH OF A CHILD OR A SPOUSE? HOW DOES ONE GET PAST THE DEATH OF PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS?

IN PSYCHOLOGICAL TERMS, "GETTING PAST" SOMETHING IN YOUR LIFE IS KNOWN AS "SUPPRESSION." IT MEANS EVERY TIME I THINK OF MY FIRST WIFE AND OUR FAMILY I PUSH THEM OUT OF MY CONSCIOUS MIND. BUT WHERE DO THEY GO? INTO THE OZONE?

NO, INTO MY UNCONSCIOUS MIND. WHERE IT CAN CAUSE HAVOC.

SUPPRESSION IS CALLED A DEFENSE MECHANISM. IT DEFENDS THE EGO AGAINST UNPLEASANT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS. SUPPRESSING SADNESS OVER A LOSS BECOMES DEPRESSION. SUPPRESSING APPROPRIATE ANGER, GRIEF, AND BETRAYAL COME OUT SIDWAYS AT THE WRONG PEOPLE. YOU KNOW HOW IT WORKS: THE BOSS KICKS THE EMPLOYEE WHO KICKS HIS WIFE WHO KICKS THE DOG WHO BITES THE MAILMAN.

BUT JESUS, WHO POINTS OUT THAT WE DON'T GET PAST ANYTHING, ALSO OFFERS THE ANTIDOTE. BUT THE ANTIDOTE IS DIFFICULT TO DECIPHER BECAUSE IT COMES IN THE IMAGE OF SALT.

"EVERYTHING WILL BE SALTED WITH FIRE. 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."

WHY DOES JESUS SEE SALT AS THE ANTIDOTE TO IGNORING, SUPPRESSING, AND DENYING OUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE?

IN ANCIENT SPIRITUAL TEXTS, SALT REFERS TO THE STABLE BASIS OF LIFE, ITS EARTHINESS, ITS GROUND, ITS BODY. SPIRITUALLY, THE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF SALT ARE BITTERNESS AND WISDOM....



**The Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
September 30, 2018**

IN MY FIRST CONGREGATION, I VISIT A WOMAN WHO HAS COME TO WORSHIP WITH HER YOUNG SON. AT HOME THAT DAY IS HER HUSBAND, A VIETNAM VETERAN FILLED WITH BITTERNESS. BITTER AT GOD OVER WHAT HE HAS SUFFERED. BITTER AT HIS COUNTRY FOR TREATING HIM LIKE A WAR CRIMINAL. BITTER AT LIFE IN GENERAL AND BITTER TOWARD ME FOR BEING A REPRESENTATIVE OF GOD AND THE CHURCH.

I SIT THERE AND TAKE IT FROM HIM. HECK, I LIKE THE GUY AND HIS HONESTY. HIS SUFFERING SMELLS REAL AND HE IS WILLING TO TRUST THAT I WILL LISTEN AND ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND HIS SUFFERING.

SO, I RETURN AND RETURN TO THEIR HOME, EACH TIME INVITING HIM TO LET ME SIT WITH HIM IN HIS BITTERNESS.

AND EVER SO SLOWLY, HIS BITTERNESS BEGINS TO DISSOLVE, LIKE SALT IN WATER. WE DRINK IT TOGETHER. WE BECAME FRIENDS. IN TIME, HE JOINS THE CHURCH WITH HIS WIFE AND SON. AND HE BECOMES RESPECTED BY OTHERS FOR HIS HARD-EARNED WISDOM.

WHERE DOES SALT MAKE ITSELF KNOWN IN OUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE? WHERE DO WE TASTE OUR OWN SALT?

IN OUR BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS. WHICH ALL ARE CONNECTED TO SUFFERING.

IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE, LUKE SAYS THAT JESUS SWEATS DROPS OF BLOOD. WE NOW KNOW THAT IF OUR ANXIETY IS HIGH ENOUGH, CAPILLARIES UNDER OUR SKIN BREAK AND WE DO SWEAT BLOOD. JESUS IS SUFFERING PROFOUNDLY IN THAT GARDEN AS HE FACES WHAT IS AHEAD OF HIM. THIS IS NO SUPERMAN JESUS. THIS IS A GOD/MAN SCARED OUT OF HIS MIND.

SALT IS A COMMON MINERAL AND SUFFERING IS OUR COMMON EXPERIENCE AS HUMAN BEINGS.

IN THE SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION OF SUFFERING, WE ARE ASKED TO LET GO OF THE CONTENT OF "WHO DID WHAT TO ME" OR "WHAT LIFE HAS HANDED ME" OR "WHY DID THIS HAPPEN TO ME?" IN ORDER TO JOIN TOGETHER IN OUR COMMON EXPERIENCE OF SUFFERING.

IT IS JUST SUFFERING. THE COUNTLESS WAYS WE ALL SUFFER IN LIFE.

WE ALL KNOW THE SALTINESS OF OUR TEARS. WE ALL KNOW THE SALTINESS OF OUR SWEAT. WE ALL KNOW THE SALTINESS OF OUR BLOOD.

BUT THIS SALTY SPIRITUAL PROCESS IS TRICKY BUSINESS. LIKE MY OFFENDED CATHOLIC WOMAN, WE CAN JUST WANT TO "GET PAST" OUR BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS. OR, LIKE LOT'S WIFE, WHO IS TURNED INTO A PILLAR OF SALT, WE CAN GET CAUGHT "LOOKING BACK," MEANING WE GET STUCK IN OUR SUFFERING EVENT. JEWISH COMMENTATORS SAY SHE IS TURNED INTO SALT OUT OF TOO MUCH MOTHER-LOVE—LOOKING BACK BECAUSE SHE DOESN'T THINK SHE CAN MOVE FORWARD UNLESS SHE KNOWS HER MARRIED DAUGHTERS ARE FOLLOWING HER....



**The Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
September 30, 2018**

AGAIN, THE ANCIENT SPIRITUAL TEXTS STATE THAT “HE WHO WORKS WITHOUT SALT CANNOT RAISE DEAD BODIES.”

MEANING, NO SALT, NO EXPERIENCING. WITHOUT SALT, LIFE IS JUST A SET OF EVENTS THAT HAPPENS TO US. NO MEANING. NO PURPOSE. NO HARD-EARNED WISDOM.

BUT, WHEN WE TASTE THE SALTINESS OF OUR WOUNDS, SALT ACTS LIKE THE GROUND OF OUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT IS CALLED “FELT EXPERIENCE.”

AND, FELT EXPERIENCE ALLOWS US TO BE RESURRECTED FROM THE SLINGS AND ARROWS OF OUR LIVES....

IN THE MOST ANCIENT RITES OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM, SALT IS TOUCHED TO THE BODY. THE ANCIENT BELIEVERS UNDERSTOOD THAT WE ARE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST’S SUFFERINGS AND NO ONE ESCAPES BEING NAILED TO THEIR OWN CROSS OF SUFFERING.

WE ARE ALL IN THIS THING CALLED LIFE THIS TOGETHER. AND, IN THIS LIFE AS CHRISTIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS, GOD WANTS US TO BE SALTY. EACH OF US SALT OF OUR OWN EARTH.

THE SOUL HAS A DRIVE TO REMEMBER WHERE WE HAVE BEEN DIS-MEMBERED. IT IS LIKE AN ANIMAL THAT RETURNS TO THE SALT LICK. THE SOUL LICKS AT IT ITS OWN WOUNDS TO DERIVE SUSTENANCE. WE MAKE SALT FOR OUR SOULS BY WORKING THROUGH OUR SUFFERING, WE GAIN SALT, HEALING OUR SOULS OF THEIR SALT-DEFICIENCY.

THE SALT WE MINE STABILIZES US. IT MARKS OUR LIFE IN DEFINED POSITIONS. IT SHAPES OUR IDENTITY AN INDIVIDUALS. I CAN SAY “BORN FROM A RANGE RIDER AND CARNIVAL WORKERS, BORN IN COLUMBUS, ATTENDED COLLEGE AND SEMINARY, FATHER ACCUSED OF EMBEZZLING, FATHER ATTEMPTS SUICIDE, MOTHER MURDERED, I MARRY, FATHER TWO SONS, AND DIVORCE, MARRY AGAIN AND GAIN A DAUGHTER, FATHER SUCCEEDS AT SUICIDE. MEANINGFUL WORK WITH PEOPLE WHO SUFFER IN CONGREGATIONS AND PSYCHOTHERAPY. NOW MINING SALT WITH THE PEOPLE OF CLC, MILLVALE. WE ALL HAVE THESE DEFINED PLACES WHERE LIFE IS SALTED AWAY AND STORED. I SPEND A LIFETIME MINING THESE EXPERIENCES FOR THEIR SALTINESS. THIS IS FELT EXPERIENCE.

IN YOUR BULLETIN THIS MORNING IS A HALF-SHEET OF PAPER WHERE I INVITE YOU TO REMEMBER YOUR LOVED ONES ON ALL SAINTS DAY, NOVEMBER 1. BUT TO DO IT DIFFERENTLY THIS YEAR AS “FELT EXPERIENCE.”

I INVITE YOU TO ANSWER TWO QUESTIONS: “WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER MOST ABOUT ANY OF YOUR LOVED ONES WHO HAVE PASSED ON?” AND “WHAT DO YOU MISS MOST?”



**The Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
September 30, 2018**

I HOPE YOU WILL JOIN ME AS WE COLLECT OUR SUFFERING IN THESE QUESTIONS SO WE CAN SHARE THEM AT THE ALTAR WITH GOD ON ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY.

BEFORE I DIE, I WOULD LIKE THE EXPERIENCE OF A FAITH COMMUNITY JOINING ME IN SHARING OUR FELT EXPERIENCE WITH ONE ANOTHER.

NOT GETTING CAUGHT UP IN FEAR OVER THE BUDGET OR WHO DOES OR DOESN'T LIKE WHAT OR HAVING TO FOCUS ON THE NAYSAYERS. BUT A COMMUNITY OF FELT EXPERIENCE.

YES, I PUT THEIR NOSES IN IT AT THE RECEPTION. BUT IF WE DON'T TRANSFORM OUR SUFFERING, WE WILL TRANSMIT IT TO OTHER PEOPLE. TRANSFORMING OUR SUFFERING IS THE ONLY WAY TO BE AT PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER.

JESUS CALLS US TO BE PEOPLE OF FELT EXPERIENCE. TO BE A COMMUNITY OF SALTY SUFFERERS. TO VOLUNTARILY JOIN WITH THE SUFFERING OF OUR COMMUNITY AND WORLD. WORTH OUR SALT.

## **SERMON SONG**

---

Long Black Veil by The Band