

TEXT: Mark 9:38-50

THEME: LIVE YOUR FAITH WITH OTHERS

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Members of a team share a common goal, and they work together as a unit to achieve that goal. Examples of teamwork are found in the world of sports and in the business world. A baseball team, like the Tigers, is a group of players working together to win a game, or right now, a place in the play-offs. A business team works together to launch a product or to increase sales, as we are trying to do right now at the Amazing Grace Bookstore.

Did you know that you are on a team? Yes, it's true, though it has nothing to do with earthly goals. You are on the team of Christianity because you believe in Christ Jesus as your one and only Savior from sin, death, the devil, and hell.

We as Christians don't wear a uniform or a special hat, and we can't tell who our teammates are just by looking at them. Instead, we are identified by what we say and do. We who know Christ as our Savior confess our faith. We speak about it; we tell others about how we are saved from our sins. We also make our faith in Christ known by our actions, like the man in our Gospel reading did.

What a joy it is for us as Christians to know that we are not alone. The disciples wanted the exclusive right to claim membership on Jesus' team, and in the process, they lost some of their joy. They also came close to damaging Jesus' work in the heart of that man who was working on Jesus' behalf.

What a joy it is for us Christians to join with those who believe in our Savior! We join with them as if to say, "I am on your team because Christ has made me his child—just as he has done for you."

By faith, which is a precious gift of the Holy Spirit, we know that we are sinners deserving of death and in desperate need of being rescued. And we know and confess that we have indeed been rescued by Christ, who came to this world to suffer the death we deserved and to give us a share in his resurrection from the grave.

The joy of a common faith launches us forward toward a common goal as members of a team whose goal is to advance God's kingdom. May the Lord bless the work we do in his name right here at Trinity Lutheran Church and School, at the Amazing Grace Bookstore, through Project Share, and through the Today's Christian Women's Retreat—all ministries of Trinity! There are so many activities and so much to do for the Lord and his people right here at Trinity with our fellow believers

Yet we cannot fully enjoy the fellowship of all believers in Jesus here on this earth because of sin. While we share faith in Jesus with many more people than just the members of Trinity or just the members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, we cannot express our fellowship because of false doctrine and practices in many Christian churches.

So we must be careful how we treat others who profess faith in our Savior Jesus while still giving a clear witness to the truth. That can create a good deal of tension among us.

That tension was evident in our Gospel reading today. The tension comes in how the disciples were treating another member of God's kingdom who didn't belong to their immediate group. "Realize," Jesus said, "that you are not the only members of my church. There are many others who have faith in me. My arms are wide open to them; don't push them away with yours."

This tension comes up again when Jesus told his disciples, **"I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward. And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck."** Jesus describes two courses of action, one that Christians should follow and one they dare never follow.

First, the positive. A cup of water seems like such a small thing to give a fellow Christian. But in days of persecution, any act of friendship toward a Christian was a dangerous thing. To give a cup of water to a believer who was in prison, whose belongings had been confiscated by the government, or who might even be facing martyrdom, identified the giver with the receiver, and the giver might suffer the same fate as the receiver. This was not a small act. It was an act of compassion, courage, and a confession of faith. May we do the same. We have an opportunity to do that next week and I'll tell you more about it in a moment during a Trinity Ministry Minute. (40 Days for Life prayer vigil in front of an abortion clinic in Saginaw on Tuesday, October 9.)

Next, the negative. To despise faith to the extent that we lead a Christian away from God is to call down God's wrath on us. God's wrath against those who do this is so great that it would be better to be drowned in the depths of the sea with a millstone around our necks than to experience that wrath. Dear Lord, from that preserve us.

But we'd NEVER do that, right? Yet is it so far-fetched that we would ever do anything to cause one of Jesus' little ones to sin? When we plan our leisure time so that it keeps our children away from God's house, where they yearn to be, we might cause them to sin by wrapping them up in the world's pleasures. When we speak against called workers because of something they did that we didn't like, we might cause our children to disrespect them. When we let our children watch things on TV or at the movies that are immoral, we may give them the impression that it's okay to watch others doing bad things as long as they don't do them themselves. When we sit back and take no action against sinful things in our world, we teach our children that sin is not all that big of a deal. With our actions, we can give our children and others around us a license to sin. Dear Lord, help us to watch our words and examples carefully; help us to LIVE OUR FAITH EVERYDAY WITH OTHERS. Amen.

