

Sermon Sept 27 2009 Mark 9:38-50 Courageous Surgery

Last week Sunday I shared this passage in a Bible Study with our "Fusion" youth group. I knew they'd be questioning the **literal interpretation of Jesus' words to cut off this or that if it's interfering in your relationship with God**. I tried to give them modern day examples of what this may be pointing to, and then promised that I'd unfold it more during the sermon time. So here you are Fusion members:

If you Google a man by the name of **A. J. Jacobs**, you'd find that he is an **American journalist and the world's greatest guinea pig**. Jacobs writes books based on his experiences of **doing extreme things** (such as our scripture passage speaks of today). **Once** he joined Mensa. "**Mensa**" (spelled) "provides a forum for intellectual exchange among members. Its activities include the exchange of ideas by lectures, discussions, journals, special-interest groups, at local, regional, national, and international gatherings."

In joining Mensa, Jacobs then **read all thirty-two volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica**. He then **wrote a book** about his experience, called *"The Know-It-All": One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World* (2004). Being a guinea pig in yet **another experience he decided only to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about everything in life**. That project and book he title *I Think You're Fat* (2007), which kind of says it all about how that project went. Once again, in yet **another plunge as a guinea pig, in order to understand dating, he became a single woman** and titled that book *The Guinea Pig Diaries* (2009). **In fact, he may be the funniest non-fiction author writing today.**

But how AJ Jacobs **fits with today's scripture passage**, is that he is now **most famous for his "The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible"** (2007), which "chronicles his experiment to live for **one year** according to all the moral codes expressed in the Bible, including stoning adulterers, blowing a shofar

at the beginning of every month, and refraining from trimming the corners of his facial hair. As a matter of fact, you will soon be seeing this at the movies, as Paramount has picked up the screenplay rights. **However, we don't read where he's cut off any body parts to assure his oneness with God!**

What he did do was **not just keep ALL** the Ten Commandments, but in fact **all 613 commandments** in the Hebrew Testament (248 positive commandments, and 365 negative ones). He says that what he' learned in this "**literal endeavor**" is that any attempt on our part to be either a Hassidic orthodox Jew, or a "real" Christian for that matter, is like comparing the Olive Garden to Italian restaurant

How many people are Christian in about the same way that Olive Garden is an Italian restaurant? How many churches are Christian in about the same way that Olive Garden is an Italian restaurant, or Taco Bell is a Mexican restaurant, or Colonel Sanders is a southern cooking restaurant?... (Illustration from [esermons.com](http://esermons.com))

In today's passage we find the disciples repeating the past and continuing to think they know what's best for God's kingdom...That **they** are the **only REAL disciples**. This passage is similar to last weeks when the disciples were arguing amongst one another as to who was the greatest. This week we have the disciples going about it a little different way. "*The apostle John came up to Jesus.*" "*Jesus*", *he said, "I was walking down the road with the rest of the disciples, and we saw someone casting out demons in your name. We tried to stop him because we don't know who he is; we tried to stop him because he's not one of us."*

Well, Jesus may have unified them with an agreement that to be the greatest they are to be "the least," but the disciples, as a group, still manage to find their egos riding high.

They insist that spiritual miracles need to be uncorrupted of those who do not follow us.

They are intolerant of others doing good outside *their* fold.

Like last week their loyalty is to the means and not the end; God.

Their loyalty is to an organization (themselves) rather than the gospel.  
Their loyalty is to the local rather than the universal.  
Their loyalty is to the negative rather than the positive.  
Their loyalty is to the forbidding rather than the rejoicing.

This story illustrates it well:

There was a small rural church one time that had a major dispute about where the pies should be placed in the kitchen prior to serving them for the annual turkey supper. One woman actually left the church community because several new comers to the church had convinced the rest of the women working in the kitchen that it would be more efficient to put the pies on the counter beside the sink instead of the counter next to the refrigerator. "It's not the right way to do it", she said. "We've never done it that way before, and I am not going to be part of doing it that way now. I won't have any part of that kind of thing. Those new people are going to ruin this church. They don't know anything. They aren't even from around here."

Does this ever sound familiar to us? Do we have ministry teams that build fences rather than roads toward glorifying God? Do we understand that God can be revealed in endless ways, and that God can transform anything from an enemy to an ally for His purposes? Do we believe that there is a divine scheme to things; that when things change or cause us anxiety that God is there, and that God knows and loves us through it? Can we be assured that God is there even when something is occurring that we see as evil or rubs us the wrong way?

I know that sometimes it seems that God is not there—think of the Holocaust or all the ways people break the commandments and others get hurt. But I would suggest that we think of God more as if God were like "Waldo." You all know the famous books and picture games called "**Where's Waldo.**" (That goofy, lanky looking teenager with jeans, a red and white striped shirt, a long chin and thick reddish/brown hair mooched under his wool red-and-white striped hat, with circle rimmed glasses,)

**who hides in huge stadiums, parks, or festivals in which you have to find him in the crowd.** God, like Waldo is there, but we struggle to physically see him, or, are convinced that this is just one of those times where He just can't possibly be found anywhere.

Friends, it's *never* one of those times for God. God's love and mercy is always there. It's we, who, like the disciples consistently try to limit God's power, presence, and goodness, while Jesus continues to seek to open our hearts and eyes to the truth. And as today's passage reads on, Jesus gets very aggressive in taking us there. He moves from warning us of the offenses of limiting God in relation to others, to now warning us of the offenses of limiting our relationship with God and our selves. He says to sacrifice whatever it is that prevents you from the kingdom of God, that prevents you from allowing God to be revealed in your life...get rid of it...whatever you need to do, get rid of it. Toss the lesser good for the greater good.

Now I questioned whether this next illustration would be too "squirmy," but squirmy won out because of its effect.

"A fellow by the name of Ed Peterman tells a story from his childhood, when he grew up on a farm in Preble County Ohio. His family discovered they had some rats in the barn, so his parents got some traps. One night they baited them with cheese, and set them out around the barn. The next morning young Ed went out to see if they had caught anything. The first traps he examined were empty. When he came to the last trap, he saw something strange. The trap had been sprung, and while there was no rat in it, he noticed that it did hold the severed leg of a rat. He ran to tell his parents about this unexpected finding. They followed him back to the barn.

When they got to the trap with the rat's leg in it, his parents just nodded and smiled knowingly. "What happened?" Ed asked them. "Tell me what happened!" So they told him. The trap had caught the rat by the leg. The rat knew that its life was at risk, so it chewed off its own leg to escape. "That's

the way rats are," his father said. "Better to go on living with only three legs, than to die with all four." Ed just stood there for a while, marveling at the courage it took for the rat to choose to survive by chewing its leg off and leaving it behind.

It makes one wonder whether we would have the courage to do what the rat did. If you were caught in a life-threatening situation one day, would you be able to cut part of yourself off and leave it behind in order to go on living? That's one of those things we never truly know, unless and until we actually faced that situation. Would I be able to surrender a hand or a leg, a memory or a grudge, an obsession or a long-held opinion, if my life were at stake?...if my eternal life were at stake? Or would I cling desperately to the futile memory of how things have always been before, and so bring about my own death?" (Jan Campbell) (Illustrations from [esermons.com](http://esermons.com))

When we choose to allow something else to become more of our identity **than** our Identity in God, Jesus is clear as to what we are to do with it. Cutting off-or-out a body part seems unrealistic, I know, but what about things that we **can** relate to?

-If my or Rev. Mercer's preaching were to somehow hide our Master, we need to zip-the-lip and let someone else speak.

-If our indulgences point to our despair or harm others we need to get help, and re-find our selves, our "Real" Identity...we need to find a way to *remember who and Whose we are*.

-If my fanaticism for my house to be perfect supersedes my *hope for a home* I need an awakening. In other words, if my need for a clean and orderly house overrides my time for prayer and meditation, or causes me to repeatedly speak to my family about what they're not doing right, or first about the glass on the table without a coaster, rather than how they are doing, I need to stop-drop-and pray or join an OCD group.

-If anything we own or do inhibits our Identity in God, our relationship with the kingdom of heaven, we are called by Jesus to do courageous surgery.

But this courageous surgery doesn't appeal to us. And because we equate it with being sacrificial we don't want to do it. Sacrifice equals pain, and we think that to allow God's will to be *means sacrifice*. We think it means cutting something out of our lives that we are convinced is necessary for our happiness and peace. We

don't trust that *the will of God will never take us to where the grace of God will protect us. The will of God will ALWAYS take us where we are protected and safe in God.*

God's will is not sacrifice; God's will is always abundance. The final sacrifice happened two thousand years ago and need never happen again. God has been trying to open our hearts to His unconditional love for us, so that we need not attach ourselves to anything temporal or tangible, but to attach our hearts to His, and live receiving His abundant will over and over in our lives. May it be so. May God's will be done, both individually and together as the church. Let us be courageous in severing all that does not glorify Him, that we may be the people He created us to be.

Let us prepare ourselves for prayer with a song:

“Sweet Hour of Prayer”

Let us pray: Holy God we thank you for this time together. We ask that You forgive us for the times and places this week where we have forgotten You, and we thank you for all those in our lives who have pointed us to a greater understanding of You. May our spiritual awakening toward You continue to be strong. May you bless us with trusting our lives, our vocations, our finances, our families, especially our children to Your will (May you bless us with trusting our church life to be in Your hands too). We thank you for the gift of Jesus who teaches us how to live, how to forgive, and how to pray: “Our Father...