

# 19th Sunday after Pentecost      September 30, 2018

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Trinity      Proper 21 (26)

Year B – the Gospel of Mark

**LUTHERAN**

## **LIVING THE ^ LECTIONARY**

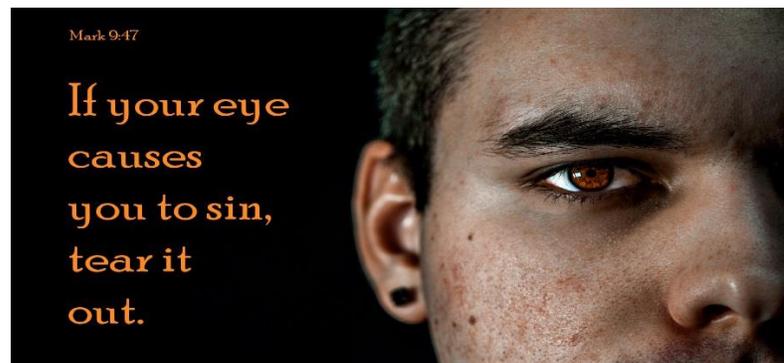
*A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.  
An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the  
rhythms of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.*

### Available on line at:

- ✦ [www.bethlehemplutheranchurchparma.com/biblestudies](http://www.bethlehemplutheranchurchparma.com/biblestudies)
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### Gather and be blessed:

- ✦ **Thursdays at 10 AM:** Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 7500 State Road, Parma, OH 44134
- ✦ **Fridays at 7 PM in a house church setting:** For details, contact Harold Weseloh at [puritaspastor@hotmail.com](mailto:puritaspastor@hotmail.com)
- ✦ **First Sunday of the month at 11 AM:** St. Philip Lutheran Church, 11315 Regalia Ave., Cleveland, OH 44104
- ✦



<https://in-the-beginning.org/2018/03/01/centered-on-christ/>

### Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 505 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 247

“Triune God, be Thou our stay”

The title of the melody in German is [GOTT DER VATER WOHN UNS BEI](#) which translates as “God our Father...”, an alternative title for this hymn. Martin Luther is also listed as an “adapter” for the words rather than an author. Richard Massie, the translator, has appeared recently in several other hymns. Consult your hymnal’s indexes to see his other hymns.

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1zCM5M6T\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1zCM5M6T_s) Sing along with the [LutheranWarbler](#)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-E0XYSI94cQ> Played on a music box. [Kloria Publishing](#)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYkobVIW6Zs> “The Traditional Classic Hymns”, Vol 2. Waldham Grove Orchestra

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, [English Standard Version \(ESV\)](#) Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

**Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29; Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), the same reading from Numbers or Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22 (Next week: Genesis 2:18-25; RCL,)**

*“These verses stand near the beginning of part II of Israel’s time of wandering in the wilderness, having just departed from Mt. Sinai (10:11-36:13; see Exodus 15:22-18:27 for part I). The entire book of Numbers is set in a journey through the wilderness (‘In the wilderness’ is the Hebrew title for Numbers). When you are reading Numbers, think journey -- journey through the wilderness of life.*

*This wilderness setting presents problems and possibilities for shaping a community identity for the newly redeemed people of God. The period of wandering is a necessary buffer between liberation and landedness for the sake of forming this identity. Such a process does not unfold easily for Israel or for God. The people have been taken out of Egypt, but it proves difficult to take Egypt out of the people. The familiar orderliness of Egypt seems preferable to the insecurities of life lived from one oasis to the next...”*

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1355](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1355) [Terence E. Fretheim](#) Elva B. Lovell Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

## The People Complain

11 And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, and when the LORD heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. <sup>2</sup>Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire died down. <sup>3</sup>So the name of that place was called Taberah,<sup>[a]</sup> because the fire of the LORD burned among them.

<sup>4</sup> Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat! <sup>5</sup> We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. <sup>6</sup> But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”

<sup>7</sup> Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium.

<sup>8</sup> The people went about and gathered it and ground it in handmills or beat it in mortars and boiled it in pots and made cakes of it. And the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil. <sup>9</sup> When the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell with it.

<sup>10</sup> Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, everyone at the door of his tent. And the anger of the LORD blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased. <sup>11</sup> Moses said to the LORD, “Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? <sup>12</sup> Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,’ to the land that you swore to give their fathers? <sup>13</sup> Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, ‘Give us meat, that we may eat.’ <sup>14</sup> I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. <sup>15</sup> If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.”

### **Elders Appointed to Aid Moses**

<sup>16</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. <sup>17</sup> And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone. <sup>18</sup> And say to the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat, for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, “Who will give us meat to eat? For it was better for us in Egypt.” Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. <sup>19</sup> You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, <sup>20</sup> but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD who is among you and have wept before him, saying, “Why did we come out of Egypt?”’”

<sup>21</sup> But Moses said, “The people among whom I am number six hundred thousand on foot, and you have said, ‘I will give them meat, that they may eat a whole month!’

<sup>22</sup> Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, and be enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, and be enough for them?” <sup>23</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “Is the LORD's hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not.”

<sup>24</sup> So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. <sup>25</sup> Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.

<sup>26</sup> Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. <sup>27</sup> And a young man ran and told

Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”<sup>28</sup> And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.”<sup>29</sup> But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”<sup>30</sup> And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

a. [Numbers 11:3](#) *Taberah* means *burning*

“No sooner have the Israelites set out from Mount Sinai than the complaining begins.

There is a memory of Egypt -- a false one, perhaps, since there’s no mention of backbreaking slave labor or drowning babies, but it’s a memory all the same -- of fish they could eat for nothing, and of flavorful cucumbers, melons, leeks, and garlic. Compared to this memory, the present reality of “nothing but all this manna to look at” is dull and uninteresting. What’s more, it cannot sustain them: “our strength is dried up.” We’ve heard this complaining before. In Exodus, the same complaint sounded like vulnerability; here it smacks of rebellion. By the end of the chapter (and outside of this lectionary selection), God will respond to the complaint by sending so much quail it will come out of the Israelites’ nostrils. God judges complaining Israel with a blessing -- or blesses them with judgment; it’s hard to tell.

But what’s surprising about this version of the story is that it draws equal attention to Moses’ disenchantment. Like the Israelites, Moses complains: his burdens are too great, and he questions whether God is really with him.. A number of interpretive questions arise. What is the gist of Moses’ complaint? Is he, like the Israelites, wrong to complain? And what are we to make of God’s response to his complaint? By distributing some of Moses’ spirit among the 70 elders, God ensures that Moses doesn’t have to bear his burdens alone anymore. But is this redistribution of the spirit, like God’s gift of quail, an ambiguous blessing that is really a punishment? If Moses must share the spirit, is he diminished in some way?

It’s possible that Moses is wrong to complain. After all, by complaining he is failing to do his proper job of interceding for the Israelites. But Moses does recognize their plight. At the very least, he hears it: “Moses heard all the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrances of their tents” (v.10). Because hearing often has the connotation of heeding and understanding (cf. Exodus 2:24-25), Moses’ hearing may well be an act of empathy and concern.

Something else blocks his intercession, and this is what provokes his complaint. What displeases Moses is not the Israelites’ complaining but God’s anger. In the aftermath of the Golden Calf incident, only Moses had found favor with God, and he relied on that favor to intercede for Israel. At that time, Moses argued that having God’s favor counted for nothing if God would not also accompany them: “For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us?” (Exodus 33:15). Moses now faces a similar crisis, and if anything, God’s anger with Israel now casts doubt on God’s favor with Moses.

Caught in a triangle between God and Israel, Moses refuses to claim sole responsibility for “this” people. They are, after all, God’s people, and Moses reminds God, sarcastically, that he was not the one who conceived them, who bore them in his bosom, who and nurtured them “as a nurse carries a sucking child,” and, not least, who promised on oath to give land to their ancestors. In all of these charges, Moses evokes well known traditions about God’s care and concern for Israel. And in the

present context of complaining about food, it is no accident that the maternal imagery emphasizes Israel's utter dependence on God. Moses is not these things to Israel; God is (Genesis 12:1-3; cf. Deuteronomy 32:18). At the heart of Moses' complaint, then, is a complaint about the divine character. What does divine favor mean, after all, if only Moses receives it? At the beginning of the long trek through the wilderness, Moses legitimately asks what is in store for him as the sole bearer of this people who were supposedly the apple of God's eye.

Fortunately, God does not respond to Moses' actual request -- "let me die!" but to the substance of his complaint -- that he is all alone with this burden. In verses 16-17, God instructs Moses to gather 70 of the elders at the tent of meeting, where God will talk with Moses and take some of the spirit that rests on Moses and distributes it among the elders. In this way, the elders will bear the burden of the people with him. Verses 24-25 describe that event, noting that the elders "prophesied" when the spirit came on them.

But is this redistribution of the spirit, like the gift of quail, a kind of punishment? After all, Moses must now share a sign of divine presence and favor that had once been exclusively his. The episode about Eldad and Medad answers that question. The narrative does not explain why these two elders were not at the tent or meeting, nor does it explain why the spirit also rested on them. But it does draw attention to ordinary human concerns: what is Moses going to think? Shouldn't they be stopped?

Moses' response sets aside the zero-sum game of prestige and honor for the far more gratuitous calculus of the Holy Spirit: "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them" (11:29). Moses had, after all, asked for divine favor, and he had also equated it with God's care and concern for the community. If that favor was bestowed upon the community in an entirely unexpected way, Moses could at least recognize the moving of the spirit within the community. Sharing burdens requires the recognition of shared gifts, and Moses was all too happy to share."

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2632](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2632) *Margaret Odell*  
Professor of Religion, St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn.

"The book of Numbers can be a theological quagmire.

Today's passage has three interwoven themes that are prominent within the book--the people's complaints, Moses' prophetic authority, and the LORD's judgment. Interpreters tend to oversimplify the relationship between these three critical elements. The LORD is often characterized as just for judging the murmuring masses, while the Israelites are condemned for being an ungrateful and rebellious people.

The complexity in this passage, however, requires more interpretative subtlety..." Read more at:

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=451](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=451) *Frank M. Yamada*

Director of the Center for Asian American Ministries McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, IL

**Psalm 104:27-35; RCL, Psalm 19:7-14 or Psalm 124 (Psalm 128; RCL, )**

*“We often correlate the Psalms with songs of praises to our Lord. These verses are no different. In these verses, the Psalmist is praising God for his supreme power over all creation. God provided for his people then, and God provides for us now.*

*In James Mays’ commentary on the Psalms, it is noted that “a traditional and favorite approach to Psalm 104 has been to interpret it as a poetic version of Genesis 1”. The Life Application Study Bible notes state that “this psalm is a poetic summary of God’s creation of the world as found in the first chapter of Genesis. What God created each day is mentioned by the psalmist as a reason to praise God...”*

[http://newhopefishers.org/mediafiles/uploaded/s/0e2261383\\_1372700155\\_summer-series-gods-provision-psalm-10427-35.pdf](http://newhopefishers.org/mediafiles/uploaded/s/0e2261383_1372700155_summer-series-gods-provision-psalm-10427-35.pdf) New Hope Presbyterian Church (and no, that is not the Lutheran James May, but it is James Luther Mays.)

## **O LORD My God, You Are Very Great**

<sup>27</sup> These all look to you,  
to give them their food in due season.  
<sup>28</sup> When you give it to them, they gather it up;  
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.  
<sup>29</sup> When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath, they die  
and return to their dust.  
<sup>30</sup> When you send forth your Spirit,<sup>[c]</sup> they are created,  
and you renew the face of the ground.

<sup>31</sup> May the glory of the LORD endure forever;  
may the LORD rejoice in his works,  
<sup>32</sup> who looks on the earth and it trembles,  
who touches the mountains and they smoke!  
<sup>33</sup> I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;  
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.  
<sup>34</sup> May my meditation be pleasing to him,  
for I rejoice in the LORD.  
<sup>35</sup> Let sinners be consumed from the earth,  
and let the wicked be no more!  
Bless the LORD, O my soul!  
Praise the LORD!

- a. [Psalm 104:19](#) Or *the appointed times* (compare [Genesis 1:14](#))
- b. [Psalm 104:26](#) Or *you formed to play with*
- c. [Psalm 104:30](#) Or *breath*

“Psalm 104 presents a glorious picture of God as creator and a sweeping view of the world God made.

The main subject of the psalm is the order of the world and the sovereignty of the God who created and maintains it. This subject in turn instills confidence that God can and will order the lives of those who seek God by keeping them in God's purpose and away from evil.

Psalm 104 draws from theological ideas similar to those in the creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:4a and the flood story in Genesis 6-9. In Genesis 1:1-2:4a God creates the world by pushing back the waters that covered the earth so there is a place for plants to grow and animals, including humans, to flourish. The flood story states that when God saw that human beings were completely bent toward evil (6:5) God decided to reverse creation and start over (note in 7:11 the flood occurred when the waters were allowed to cross the boundaries God had made). But after the flood God realized that humans were still inclined toward evil (8:21b). Nevertheless, God decided to allow the world to remain intact (8:21a). This promise is the most basic sign of God's grace. God determined to be patient with human beings and not to punish them as they deserve to be punished...

Verses 31-35 conclude the psalm with calls for God to be praised and honored. The first part of the final verse is not part of the lectionary reading, but it actually illustrates the theological point of the rest of the psalm. Verse 35a asks that "sinners be consumed from the earth." The petition is consistent with the rest of the psalm in that the order of God's world will not ultimately accommodate rebellion against God's rule.

It may be helpful to note, further, that the main Hebrew manuscript used to translate the Old Testament (known as the Masoretic Text) actually reads "Let *sins* cease." NRSV and NIV are translating "sinners" because that word appears in a manuscript from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The translators thought "sinners" was more logical since the term "wicked" appears as a parallel word later in the verse. Regardless of which wording is most accurate, however, the notion that God would cause "sins" to end is consistent with the spirit of the psalm.

God created the world with order and purpose and anyone or anything that acts against that purpose essentially tries to undo the good creation God established. Thus, the final petition of Psalm 104 is not really a prayer against particular people, but against the forces of evil with which people sometimes cooperate against the wishes of the Creator."

- [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1686](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1686) [Jerome Creach](#)  
Robert C. Holland Professor of Old Testament, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary,  
Pittsburgh, Penn.

"It is a blessing to the preacher when the movement of a passage of Scripture offers a ready guide to interpretation and proclamation. This reading from Psalm 104 is a case in point.

A quick glance at the text reveals a three-part structure:

- Verses 24 through 26 describe the wondrous character of God's creation;
- Verses 27 through 30 describe God's providence;
- Verses 31 through 35 turn to praise..."

- [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=604](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=604) [Matthew Stith](#)  
Pastor, Round Hill Presbyterian Church, Elizabeth, Pa.

**James 5: (1-12) 13-20; RCL, James 5:13-20 James 5:1-12) 13-20); RCL, James 5:13-20 (Hebrews 2:1-13 (14-18) )**

The readings from James conclude today. The combined readings with commentary are available on request.

The Lutheran Study Bible introduces verses 1-6 "...as in 4:13-17 and 2:2-7, this section warns against self-reliance that submit to God's will but turns from God toward "friendship with the world" (4:4)...", page 2142.

Cathy Deddo has written a Bible Study on James. Her section on James 5:1-6 has a similar view about the relationship to chapter 4 and names three things that "get in the way of trusting fully in God's character and work...the first is the temptation to put down or judge our brothers and sisters... second...to make our own plans, without having God lead... and third... to put our trust in wealth. Read her complete section at the Trinity Study Center.

- [http://www.trinitystudycenter.com/james/james\\_5-1-6.php](http://www.trinitystudycenter.com/james/james_5-1-6.php) Cathy Deddo

"Already in 5:7 James had addressed the issue of suffering. People need to hold out with patience and not be at each other's throats (5:9). We need the patience of the farmer who knows that a harvest will come - in time (5:7). The setting for this thought is the belief that Jesus would come again, presumably in the lifetime of the hearers (5:8). This hope was difficult to sustain. It is even less realistic for us, two millennia later. On the other hand, one characteristic of Christian faith remains hope. This is sometimes collapsed into hope for an after life, but we should see it as just as much a hope for change in this world. We do not expect magic solutions, sudden divine interventions which will bring justice for all. We identify more with the yearning of the Spirit for renewal. When we take seriously what is happening in our world and around us, the result can be depressing. The encouragement to hope is grounded in an almost defiant expectation that engaging in the life of God in the world is engaging in life and life that will bear fruit. Sometimes it is very hard to hold onto that. The wisdom of James points us to the faithfulness of the prophets and also to Job (5:10-11)..."

- <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/BEpPentecost18.html> Reverend Emeritus Professor William R. G. Loader at [Murdoch University](http://www.murdoch.edu.au), Australia

## Warning to the Rich

5 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. <sup>2</sup>Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. <sup>3</sup>Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. <sup>4</sup>Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. <sup>5</sup>You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup>You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

## Patience in Suffering

<sup>7</sup>Be patient, therefore, brothers,<sup>[a]</sup> until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early

and the late rains. <sup>8</sup> You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. <sup>9</sup> Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. <sup>10</sup> As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

<sup>12</sup> But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

*(“...This text in James has loomed large in discussions (or worse) between Catholics and Protestants for centuries. It does provide the main basis for the Roman Catholic understanding of the anointing of the sick (extreme unction) as a sacrament. Most Roman Catholic scholars would readily admit, however, that a sacrament per se is not fully revealed in this text in James. It does, however, launch a trajectory that finds a fuller expression revealed in later church tradition...”)*

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1416](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1416) **Micah D. Kiel**  
Associate Professor of Theology, St. Ambrose University, Davenport, Iowa. “Though I am now Roman Catholic, I grew up in a fairly conservative evangelical home.”

### **The Prayer of Faith**

<sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup> Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>17</sup> Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. <sup>18</sup> Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

<sup>19</sup> My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, <sup>20</sup> let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

- a. [James 5:7](#) Or *brothers and sisters*; also verses [9](#), [10](#), [12](#), [19](#)
- b. [James 5:16](#) Or *The effective prayer of a righteous person has great power*

“...The preceding chapters in the Epistle of James have described the ideal of a congregation that lives cooperatively, harmoniously, in concord with heaven's peaceable grace -- and that repudiates wrangling, privilege, and domination.

James addresses communities more than individuals (“to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora,” 1:1), and he promotes an ethic of integrity that emphasizes building one another up. He ends the epistle with the verses from today's lesson, an apparently somewhat miscellaneous array of exhortations.

These verses describe some of the goings-on one might expect to observe in the sort of community James has in mind. Although James uses the form of imperative verbs, the context of the whole letter warrants our reading these verses not just as an array of commands; we do well to read these also as a description of what the ideal congregation behaves like. A harmonious, mutually-concerned congregation will evince the sort of relationships James endorses here.

A congregation under the influence of James would be committed to sharing each other's burdens and joys. In previous chapters, James envisions a community where class and poverty do not divide disciples; here, he applies the same logic to grief and illness and sin. If one member is sick, the whole congregation is weaker. Anyone who is afflicted should feel confident to ask for help from their neighbors, and the congregation's leaders will pray on their behalf and treat them with oil (used for medicinal properties among pagan healers as well as among Jews and Christians) in the name of the Lord...

James also reintroduces the topic of truthfulness as an aspect of community life. Whereas in preceding passages he has focused on the destructive consequences of intemperate speech, here he emphasizes the positive necessity of telling the truth. In 5:12, he insists that disciples tell the truth at all times, to the extent that they need never take oaths (since everything they say is true)...

The benefits of our caring for one another are not always (we may even say not usually) immediately obvious. James therefore reminds the congregation that faithfulness requires patience (5:7-11). At the same time, James considers Elijah the example of someone who, although human in every way, wrought extraordinary effects by his righteousness and his confident prayer. By citing both the importance of patience and the actual example of Elijah, James frames his exhortation so as to underscore both the possibility of miraculous fulfillment of our prayers, and the inevitable unlikelihood that we will witness such a dramatic response...

Most congregations have not been as comprehensively transformed as James would wish for them -- but rather than writing off this letter as unrealistic or impractical, we would do well to begin experimenting with the kinds of community practices James proposes. As James would say, such experiments make an occasion for faith to show its effects in our works, and for our works to bring faith to completion.

➤ [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=447](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=447)  
[A.K.M. Adam](#) Tutor in New Testament, St. Stephen's House, Oxford University, Oxford, England, U. K.

**Mark 9:38-50; RCL, the same reading (Mark 10:2-16; RCL, the same reading)**

*"This story comes as Jesus heads toward Jerusalem.*

*Throughout Mark 8-10, Jesus struggles to turn the disciples' thoughts from human thoughts to God's thoughts. The disciples have great difficulty getting to where Jesus is leading them. Peter tried to protect his friend from the danger ahead, and Jesus called him Satan. The disciples argued among themselves about who was greatest and Jesus called them to welcome children. Remember last week when he held that toddler in his arms? Our story picks up there and we have no indication that Jesus has set aside the child..."*

- [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3787](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3787)  
**Philip Ruge-Jones** Associate Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, Wis. Read the entire commentary for his observations about John in this reading.

## The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the 9th Chapter”

### Anyone Not Against Us Is for Us

<sup>38</sup> John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name,<sup>[a]</sup> and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” <sup>39</sup> But Jesus said, **“Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. <sup>40</sup> For the one who is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup> For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.**

### Temptations to Sin

<sup>42</sup> **“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,<sup>[b]</sup> it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. <sup>43</sup> And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell,<sup>[c]</sup> to the unquenchable fire.<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. <sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup> ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’ <sup>49</sup> For everyone will be salted with fire.<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>50</sup> Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”**

- a. [Mark 9:38](#) Some manuscripts add *who does not follow us*
- b. [Mark 9:42](#) Greek *to stumble*; also verses [43](#), [45](#), [47](#)
- c. [Mark 9:43](#) Greek *Gehenna*; also verse [47](#)
- d. [Mark 9:43](#) Some manuscripts add verses [44](#) and [46](#) (which are identical with verse [48](#))
- e. [Mark 9:49](#) Some manuscripts add *and every sacrifice will be salted with salt*

## “This is the Gospel of the Lord” “Praise to You, O Christ”

“...This text draws several teachings of Jesus into a teaching block to focus on the radical call of following Jesus. Jesus has a special place for children and the powerless in his teaching. The most remembered teaching of Jesus is still ahead in chapter ten: "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs" (10:14). Our text anticipates this teaching as Jesus warns against putting "a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me" (9:42a).

To cause a little one to fall away, to turn from Jesus, brings forth one of the harshest sayings of Jesus in the gospels. If there is anything that brings about the fall of little ones, "it would be better for you if a great millstone was hung about your neck and you were thrown into the sea" (9:42b).

This harsh saying is followed by sayings on maiming. Three of the most precious members of the human body come into focus for severe judgment: hand, foot, and eye. The three members follow the same pattern: "And 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 to hell, to the unquenchable fire" (9:43). The same severe judgment follows with the foot being cut off (9:45), and with the tearing out of the eye (9:47).

Jesus' concern for "little ones" or "powerless ones" is ultimate. The gathered sayings are concluded with yet another ominous word identifying what continues for the unrighteous in eternal punishment, "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (9:48). There is a word of hope over and against a word of judgment in these sayings of Jesus, and is present in the words the evangelist calls forth from the prophet Isaiah. This saying in Mark is the final word from the last verses of the prophet Isaiah, words of judgment set within the context of promise and hope:

"For as the new heaven and the new earth which I will make, shall remain before me, says the LORD; so shall your descendants and your name remain.

From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the LORD.

And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; *for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched*, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh" (Isaiah 66:22-24).

The closing admonition of our text is the claim and promise of God and Jesus' call to live as God's intended purpose in creating us for life: "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another" (9:50b). This is the call, identity, and promise of discipleship which is the peace that Jesus offers to all his followers. We are called by Jesus into a cosmic engagement against the powers of evil and injustice and to serve our neighbor in love..."

- [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=397](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=397) [Paul S. Berge](#)  
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