

A question that immediately comes to mind for me today, is
"Who is 'us'???"

It was the Apostle John (of all people) (I mean, this is the disciple who later on in life, had so much to teach us about 'love')... and yet it's this very-same John, who (at this point) reckons he's going to earn some Brownie points with Jesus, when he says:

"Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."

...

So, who is "us"??? And why did John feel, that if that bloke, was going to be doing something in the Name of Jesus, then that bloke should be:

- "**following** us"; Or maybe
- His point was, that he should be "**one** of us"; Or
- Maybe it should **just** be **us**, and nobody else should dare to step onto our turf...
- Because, "This is what **we** do..." "**We** do stuff in the Name of Jesus" – who does he think he is ...

And John comes out of this looking so 'small'... John's vision of the Kingdom of God, was so limited;

Jesus' answer was: **Don't** stop him...

Way back in Mark 4, Jesus gave a series of parables – agricultural parables actually, talking about the Kingdom of God, and how it would grow...

1. The parable of the sower, where:

- the word of God is sown out into the world.
- Some receive the word and some don't;
- Some keep on going in the word and are fruitful;
- But others fall away

2. The parable of the seed growing – it begins, by sprouting under the ground, and we don't even see it happening, but it grows – it's something that God does, and to us, it's a bit of a mystery...; and

3. The parable of the mustard seed – What begins as this tiny little seed, grows, and becomes this large, spreading plant, that birds can nest in... And that's what the Kingdom of God is like – it starts out small, but it grows...

And that, is what's happening here (in chapter 9)... The Kingdom of God was growing... here was this man, casting out demons – he was doing amazing works in the Name of Jesus – he's being fruitful for Jesus ... but the disciples failed to recognise it, and they tried to shut him down.

They were doing to this man, exactly what the Pharisees had been doing to Jesus... They failed to recognise the activity of the Holy Spirit, and so they tried to shut him down...

Who is "us"??? Well, I believe it's best for us to define "Us", as the Christian church...

The Lord Jesus Christ, is the Head of the church, and the members of the church, are those who are disciples of Jesus...

- The church is not an institution;
- it's not any particular denomination; and
- it's certainly not a state-sanctioned body for the worship of God

although the church **can** be found in **all** of these places...

The church is the Lord Jesus Christ, and **His** disciples...

Now, the thing is, the Apostle John and presumably the apostles, whom he spoke on behalf of, felt that because this man wasn't following **them**, he wasn't part of Jesus' church... They saw him as being on the outside..

And let me tell ya, as a leader in a church, "I get this" – that because this man wasn't following them, they assumed he wasn't part of Jesus' church... "I get this"

I am very aware that this is a trap that pastors and leaders of a church can very easily fall into... We get all zealous for God (& that's a good thing), but sometimes our zeal, is misdirected zeal... This is a temptation that **I** have to guard against – and it's the temptation, to start seeing "the church" or "the only proper church" – "the only faithful church", as our own little patch, and having the attitude, that everybody else is on the wrong track...

The twisted logic goes like this: We are so sure that we're following Jesus – we're so sure, that this is how Jesus is

leading us, therefore anyone who wants to be following Jesus, needs to be following Jesus with us...

It's twisted, isn't it... But it's a very easy trap to fall into – I've been there...

(You understand, this is a confession – I'm not saying this is a good thing)

So, what does Jesus have to say about "us"? Who is "us"?
Who is Jesus' church???

Well, let me say, it's really important that we take-in **everything** Jesus has to say about this...

If we only take vv39-41, we'll have a very **wide** view of who the church is – it could be almost bordering on "universalism"... You could almost come away with the impression that anyone who doesn't personally want to drive the nails into Jesus, is part of the church (not quite, but it could be seen as a very wide view)...

Likewise, if we only took vv42-50, and put it together with a few other 'like' verses from other books of the Bible, we'd come to a very **narrow** view of who the church is, and we'd probably come to the view that "we're the only Godly church in town"... (of course the other churches would come to that same view about themselves...)

And so it's really important, that we take in **everything** Jesus has to say about this:

But it begins like this: The church, is **much** bigger than those disciples ever imagined...

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Righto... Before we get into this too far, I need to explain something:

We're going to look at it more in depth next week, but our passage for today, is a section where Jesus uses a fair bit of hyperbole. "What's hyperbole?" some of you may ask...

Hyperbole is an over-the-top statement, that is given to make a point (it's not usually meant to be taken literally)... So for instance, we might say:

- That bag weighs a ton... Well yeah, it might be very heavy, but it doesn't weigh a "ton"...
- That was the worst day ever... Well, it might've been a very bad day, but it's unlikely that it's the worst...
- So-and-so's as skinny as a rake... No, they're probably not.
- I cannot live without him... Yes you can... You might miss him, but you're not going to die because he goes away...

Alright, that's a few examples of hyperbole, **but** when **Jesus** uses hyperbole, it's generally a bit different... Yes it **is** an over-the-top statement, given to make a point (and it's **not** usually meant to be taken literally), but when Jesus uses hyperbole, it **is** actually true.

Alright, so let me give you an example: We're going to be talking about this more next week, but in our reading, we

heard Jesus say: **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, to the unquenchable fire.**

That's hyperbole...

- It's a shocking statement;
- It's an over-the-top statement;
- It's not meant to be taken literally....
- But you know what??? It is actually true...

If my hand is the thing causes me to sin, and that by sinning, I'm going to go to Hell, yeah, I'd be better to cut off my hand and live a few decades as a cripple, then to keep both my hands and go to Hell for all eternity... It is actually true...

But it's hyperbole... Jesus isn't telling me to cut off my hands – He's telling me to cut off whatever causes me to sin... So, for example:

If my temptation is drunkenness, Jesus would say to me, don't put yourself in a position where you get tempted: Don't go to the pub; don't have alcohol in the house; don't hang out with those certain people, who get you drunk... Righto: Cut off, whatever it is, that causes you to sin..

Do you get the point??? Can you see how hyperbole works???

- It's a broad statement;
- It's a sometimes shocking statement.
- And it makes a point,
- but it's not generally meant to be taken literally.

OK...

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So, here Jesus gives us a picture of the church, and I believe what Jesus is saying here, is bordering on hyperbole: His point is, He wants to expand our vision of the church, and so He gives us a **very wide** view of what the church is...

"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.

Alright, so **one** indication, that someone belongs to Jesus, is the ability to do mighty works in the Name **of** Jesus. Now, that should be **obvious**, But some of you might be very quick to point out, "But hang-on, Michael, what about in Matthew 7, when Jesus said :

Matthew 7:21 **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'**

Alright, so here in Mark, Jesus is saying, "If someone is doing mighty works in My Name, they're unlikely to be against me"... But in Matthew 7, He says: "**Many** who do mighty

works in My Name, I don't even know". He calls them:
workers of lawlessness ...

How do we make sense of that???

I'll tell you how: when it comes to other disciples of Jesus,
God is their judge – not us. In Romans 14, Paul says: ⁴
**Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his
own master, he stands or falls"...**

You see, when it comes to other disciples of Jesus, our default
position should **not** be one of suspicion and rejection... We
shouldn't expect that they have to prove themselves to us,
before we accept them as a brother or a sister in Christ... In
the absence of evidence to the contrary, if someone is doing
mighty works in the Name of Jesus, our default position
should be "Yay, isn't God good... Welcome brother"... But
of course, if evidence turns up to the contrary, than we have to
revise that position, but we should never **begin** from a place of
suspicion and rejection...

If they claim to be a Christian, assume they are a brother or
sister in Christ, until we see evidence to the contrary...

The second thing Jesus says is:

⁴⁰ **For the one who is not against us is for us.**

And then He says:

**whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because
you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.**

Now, I believe we've also got a touch of hyperbole here... These are over-the-top statements, that are not meant to be taken literally, but if we analyse them deeply enough, they are actually true...

Alright, so what's the thing that Jesus is trying to get across here??? Our default position, (unless we're given good reason to doubt it), is to assume, that those who appear to be "for Jesus" – and if they support Jesus, and they support **disciples** of Jesus (**because** they belong to Christ), assume that they themselves are disciples of Jesus...

Until we see evidence to the contrary, see them as a brother or sister in Christ. (even if they go to a different fellowship)... But do you see what else Jesus is saying here??? You be the one who gives the cup of water – don't exclude – be hospitable... You won't lose your reward...

But, I do urge caution here:

If we don't recognise the ramifications of what Jesus is **fully** saying, we could come to the conclusion that "anyone who is polite to a Christian, will himself be considered a Christian..." or "anyone who's not nasty to Christians, gets a ticket to glory"... Some people would even tend toward "universalism" and conclude that a Muslim who's nice to Christians, is saved; or a Hindu who's nice to Christians, is saved; or even an atheist who's nice to Christians is saved...
Not so...

You see, what Jesus said, actually has boundaries within itself – it's not opened right up to everyone...

Boundary #1

The one who does a mighty work in the **Name** of Jesus, can't later on, speak evil of Jesus...

Now, to do something in the **Name** of Jesus, isn't just a matter of tacking on those words... To do something in the Name of Jesus, means we have to be following Jesus, and working with Jesus... And if someone, later on, speaks evil of Jesus, well, they haven't been working in the Name of Jesus...

Boundary #2

the one who is not against us is for us.

Now, by the world's standards, in our culture, it seems the greatest virtue – perhaps the **only** virtue that seems to be valued in our culture at the moment, is "tolerance"... And looking at this through the eyes of our culture, it **could** be saying "If you **tolerate** Christians, you're in..."

The problem is, nowhere in the Scriptures, is tolerance seen as a virtue...

You see, here in Mark, Jesus said: **the one who is not against us is for us.** But in Matthew, Jesus gives us the flip-side of this: He said: "**Whoever is not with me, is against me.**" One seems to include. The other seems to exclude.

And in the letters written by the Apostles, this is spelled out really clearly... Anyone who doesn't bow their knee before the Lord Jesus Christ, and submit to Him as Lord, is an enemy...

And so, when Jesus said "**the one who is not against us is for us.**", who's against Jesus & His church??? Anyone who's not a disciple of Jesus is against Him...

Boundary #3

whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

because you belong to Christ

This isn't a picture of hospitality for hospitality's sake. It's not a picture of generosity for generosity's sake... It's not a picture of being nice to someone because it's the humane thing to do...

This is one person, showing hospitality, to another person, for one simple reason – they show hospitality because the recipient belongs to Christ... Now, to us, the word "Christ" – we might just see it as another name for Jesus... But not to the Jew... To those who this Gospel was written, "The Christ", is the chosen one of God... And for them to acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, is a personal step of faith...

OK, so this is not a big, wide picture of "universalism", where nice people of all sorts of different religions (or of no religion at all), get to go to glory... It's a picture of those who express faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in word **and** action...

And I believe, the point Jesus is making, is “we are sometimes way too quick, to make a judgment **against** someone, and we decide they’re not one of us...” We judge them too quickly... Our default position, should be, that when a person expresses faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in word **and** action, recognise them as a brother or sister in Christ... Unless (of course), we see some other evidence against their sincerity...

Are you with me?

Do you hear what Jesus is saying here???

John is concerned that this man (driving out demons) isn't following us,, Whereas Jesus' answer is saying, “**He is us**” – Forget about him not following us – “**He is us**”... **We** are the church... He is **in** the church... He is us...

Let's make this really personal, and really local:

Even in this little town here of St George, who is us??? Who is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ??? Let's go alphabetically: Is it:

- Anglican
- AOG
- COC
- Lutherans
- Presbyterian
- Roman Catholic Church
- Uniting Church; or

- Is it this little church of Bush Disciples???

Who is us???

Well, unless there's evidence to the contrary, our default position, should be: when a person expresses faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in word **and** action, there is the church...

Now we covered a few boundaries to this, but Jesus then goes on to include the boundary of the seriousness of sin...

People of the world, don't want to be reminded of the seriousness of sin...

In the news at the moment, even those who are not Rugby Union fans, have probably become familiar with the name, Israel Folau... In his personal social media, he said, that:

- *Drunks*
- *Homosexuals*
- *Adulterers*
- *Liars*
- *Fornicators*
- *Thieves*
- *Atheists*
- *Idolaters*

Will go to Hell, unless they repent and turn to Jesus.

His personal words were:

"Those that are living in Sin will end up in Hell unless you repent. Jesus Christ loves you and is giving you time to turn away from your sin and come to him."

How do you think the world responded to that??? I think the outcome of his hearing was yesterday, but even before the hearing, Rugby Australia said that these views are not acceptable; It's been said that he's not a good role-model for children (when he holds such views) QANTAS has threatened to 'pull' sponsorship... And Rugby Australia, made it very clear, that even if the tribunal decides that he didn't do anything wrong, RA will not let him play rugby in Australia again...

Can you believe it??? If you quote Scripture, and believe Scripture, according to the world, you're not a good role model... The reason: - Scripture highlights the seriousness of sin and it highlights consequences of sin... , and people of the world don't want to be reminded of this...

Jesus highlights the seriousness of sin, and He uses hyperbole to do it. We've already talked about it a bit. We'll talk about it more next week... But from the beginning of v42, Jesus sets a 5th boundary, for those who would claim to belong to Christ... And it's a very serious boundary indeed... And it's a boundary that I (as a bible teacher), must **not** take lightly...

42 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.

What kind of teaching, is presented either **by** a church, or **within** a church, is serious, serious business...

If by what I teach, I cause someone to fall into sin, I would be better off, if I was drowned... Do you understand this???

There are eternal consequences, for those who lead Jesus' children into sin... I find that very sobering...

This is a very clear boundary, for when we consider who is, and who is **not** a brother or sister in Christ...

- It's about what we believe
- It's about what we teach
- It's about how we act

It's one of the clearest boundaries, that limits what fellowships; and it limits what denominations can legitimately claim to be the body of Christ...

When a church body begins to redefine "sin", or begins to accept sin... When its teaching causes others to embrace "sin" or to fall into "sin"... That, is a boundary that should never be crossed...

Most of you know my story... I used to be a minister in a certain denomination... But over a number of years, that denomination ceased to be concerned about the seriousness of sin... They even went to the extent of coming to the position that marriage doesn't have to be between a man and a woman – Their doctrine now says that a man can marry a man – a woman can marry a woman... They proclaim that this is God's intent for marriage...

And people who have been struggling with that particular temptation, are now being told, you don't have to struggle with this... It's not a temptation... Just do it... It's not sin...

And at the advice of that church's doctrine, Jesus' "little ones" are being led into sin... Now, that scares me... Oh, what a bitter fate, for those who are responsible...

But that's just one example... I use it because it's an obvious example; it's a personal example... And even ministers within that church, have come to the belief that by taking this position, that denomination has stepped outside of the One Holy Apostolic Church...

This is serious stuff...

But it's not only serious stuff for a denomination – it's serious stuff for us personally... As we live as disciples of Jesus, acceptance of Christ, also means rejection of sin...

Now, we're going to leave it there for today... Next week, we're going to talk more about the transformed life of a Christian, as we leave sin behind, and we follow the path of righteousness...

But for today, I want to encourage you: Be fast to recognise a disciple of Jesus, as a brother or sister in Christ...

Unless there's evidence to the contrary, our default position, should be: when a person expresses faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in word **and** action, there is the church...

But don't be blind... Jesus sets some very clear boundaries, for what is, and what is not the church... Of first importance, is for us:

- To believe the truth;
- To preach the truth;
- And to live out the truth...

But let's not forget the importance of fellowshiping with our Brothers and Sisters in Christ... Jesus' church, is so much bigger than we often envisage...

Let's pray,
Lord, I personally confess, that too many times,
I've been too quick, to judge others...
I've been too quick to be suspicious;
to be distant;
to be self-righteous, and not so sure of the other...

Lord, I pray that you would give us hearts that desire fellowship;
Fellowship beyond our own little gathering;
That we would recognise your disciples,
and that we would embrace them, as our spiritual family...

Lord, when we hear of mighty works being done in Your Name,

may our initial reaction be one of praise, rather than
condemnation;

May it be one of encouragement, rather than opposition...

Lord, may we never be found, working against Your Holy
Spirit.

But Lord, we also pray, that you would give us discernment,
That we would not be led astray,
And that you would open our eyes to those who are workers of
lawlessness.

And Lord, Help us to be a fellowship who love.
Who love You;
Who love our brother and sister in Christ;
Who love the world, and want to see them saved...

And Lord, may we never cause one of your little ones to sin...
Help us to walk in Your path of righteousness,
And to lead others in Your path of righteousness.

In Jesus' Name,
Amen...