

# "You've Got a Right?"

Mark 9:38-41

September 27, 2015

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

"I've got my rights, you know!" How often have you heard that phrase uttered? There is so much discussion these days about rights. These are often special "rights" based on gender, race, sexual orientation or gender identification. Often these are "rights" that others may not possess. For example, you or I would never be allowed to be in a locker room for members of the opposite sex. However, some today demand the right to use the locker room of the opposite sex if they self-identify as that gender. Sometimes, we bring this talk of rights and privileges into the kingdom of God. We may think that we have certain rights and privileges within the congregation because we are older than others, have been members longer than others, or have been elected to a position of leadership within the congregation. We may think that we have certain rights and privileges within the church at large because we are Lutheran and possess the pure teaching of the Word of God.

We wouldn't be the first ones to think of special rights within the Kingdom of God. Our Gospel reading for today tells of a man who was casting out demons but was not part of the apostolic group. Now, this was a bit strange that someone who was not a part of the apostles should be doing this and it was strange that someone who was able to do this did not join Jesus' group of disciples. So, the disciples forbade him to do what he was doing unless he would follow Jesus as they did. John comes to report to Jesus what they had done. He says, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to stop him because he was not following us." John likely felt that the apostles, because of their higher ranking and closeness to Jesus, were the ones who should be doing such important work. In fact, just prior to this text, the apostles had been having an argument while they walked on the road about who was the most important of them. No doubt, John expected that Jesus would not only justify them for what they had done in trying to stop the man, but commend them for it. Jesus surprises John and the other apostles by saying instead, "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. For the one

who is not against us is for us. 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." Jesus is making two points here.

First of all, that which is good and whoever does good should not be prohibited from doing so, even though there be some defect or irregularity in the manner of doing it. Paul says the same thing of those who preached Christ out of selfish ambition. He says, "But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached."

(Philippians 1:18) This man here had faith in God and would never use Jesus' name to speak evil. Even though he was not part of that particular group, he was for Jesus. He was on the same side as the apostles in the fight against Satan.

Secondly Jesus comments on what service is important to God. It is not just the so-called big things, like casting out demons, done by the so-called important people, namely the apostles. Even the humblest of tasks - such as giving a cup of cold water in Christ's name to a believer - is noticed by God and rewarded by Him.

These are important words for all of us. We, like the apostles, may feel that we are entitled to rights or special status within the kingdom of God or that we are somehow better than others who serve the Lord apart from us. We may feel that our congregation or denomination is superior to others. When that happens, it is not because we, our congregation, or our synod are actually better or more important in God's eyes, or because we have special rights to do certain things. It is because of our sinful pride. We have no rights before God, except for one. We have earned the right to die in hell forever because of our sin. That is the only thing we have earned. We deserve nothing else.

Everything we have or do is because of God's grace -- His undeserved love for us. This is especially true about our entrance and status in the Kingdom of God. Because of His great love for us, God sent His Son, Jesus, who was the greatest to become the least. As Paul writes in Philippians about Jesus, "[He] being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human

likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!"

By His humble death as the payment for our sin and pride, we are brought by Him into the Kingdom of God where we are all called to serve together. Peter writes, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." And, in that serving, we are all equal. Paul writes to the Galatians, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." It doesn't matter how old you are, what nationality you are, what gender you are, how long you've been a Christian, what elected position you may have in the church, or what denomination you belong to. If you are doing the will of God by faith in Jesus Christ, you are not to be stopped because you are not part of the right group. Instead, you are encouraged to do the will of God in whatever context you find yourself in.

A few notes of caution need to be mentioned. First, just because you say you are doing the will of God and serving Him does not mean that you are. You can be sincere about what you are doing but sincerely wrong. So, if a traveling preacher has a message that says you need to make a decision for Christ and open your heart to Him to be saved, we would forbid him from preaching here and would speak against his message. Why? Because he's not part of our group? No, because His message does not agree with the Word of God. Similarly, if someone claiming to be a Christian is working hard to pass laws that allow for same sex marriage or allow for the right to an abortion, we would oppose such action. Why? Because that person is not a part of our group? No, because that person is advocating things that are in conflict with the Word of God.

Secondly, God has given certain tasks to certain people and not others for the sake of order in His church. For example, there are some things God has given to men to do which He has not given to women to do and vice versa. There are some things that God has specifically given to pastors to do. To stop someone from doing something which God does not allow him or her to do such as a

woman becoming a pastor or someone preaching without being called is not violating what Jesus says here but is being faithful to the Word of God.

As Christians, we are called to faith in Jesus Christ and to live out that faith in service to Him by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We are called to put aside feelings of pride or jealousy for those serving God who are maybe not exactly like us or not part of our group. Instead, we are to encourage all who serve God and do His will, whoever and wherever they might be. And, instead of worrying about who's more important - our group or their group, our way of serving or their way of serving - we are to be more concerned about selflessly serving others, even in the most humble of ways - offering the drinks of cold water in Jesus' name, washing feet, and so on. As Jesus had just told His disciples, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

On many police shows on television, when an arrest is made, the phrase that is often heard is, "Read him his rights." While rights may be something that criminals have in our judicial system, there are no rights to be read to us as Christians for we have none. We have no rights, merely wonderful privileges. We have the privilege of having our sins forgiven and being saved from the power of death and the suffering of hell through the death of Jesus Christ and His glorious resurrection. We have the privilege of being in a relationship with the God who created the universe. We have the privilege of serving in His kingdom and encouraging others to do the same without having to be jealous, arrogant, or in competition with them. We have the privilege of doing the humblest of tasks, knowing that our Savior has done the same and that God is pleased with them. Therefore, do not demand your rights, but, rather, enjoy your privileges, which you receive by God's grace, as a member and servant in His Kingdom. Amen.