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Proper 21B - Ordinary 26B - Pentecost +17  
Sunday, September 27, 2009  
Mark 9:38-50

## Stumbling Blocks

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, 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 deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. <sup>40</sup>Whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup>For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. <sup>43</sup>If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. <sup>45</sup>And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. <sup>47</sup>And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup>where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

"For everyone will be salted with fire. <sup>50</sup>Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

(Note: For today's sermon you will need a large piece of cardboard or some other item behind which you can conceal your hand from the children's view.)

Today I thought we'd play a game. Here are the rules: I'm going to hold up a certain number of fingers and I'd like you to count them and tell me how many I'm holding up. Easy enough? Let's try it. (Hold up fingers in 2-3 combinations allowing children to name how many you've raised.)

OK...let's keep going. (This time use the cardboard to conceal the number of fingers you're holding up.) How many now? Can you tell? Why not?

Oh, is the cardboard a problem? Makes it hard to follow the rules anymore, doesn't? I'm doing my part, but you can't do yours, because I've put a problem – a barrier – in your way.

Do you know that word? A barrier is something that blocks something from happening.

Some barriers are good. On the road you might notice that sometimes there are barriers (walls or cables) between the cars going one direction and the cars going the other. And there are barriers at the zoo aren't there? Dangerous animals are kept in cages or behind glass to block them from getting out or hurting anyone.

But sometimes barriers make it hard to follow the rules and do what's right. We sometimes call those "stumbling blocks" – because they trip us up and keep us from doing what we're supposed to.

When I was your age I sometimes had problems doing the right thing at school when I would sit with certain friends. I knew the rules, but it was so tempting to talk and be silly when certain friends were right there with me. Can you guess what my teachers did when that happened? You're right: They moved us apart. They helped me to do the right thing by taking away the problem – or stumbling block – that was making things so difficult for me.

In today's Gospel story Jesus talks about stumbling blocks. He tells the disciples that if something is getting in your way and keeping you from making good choices you need to get rid of it. So this week I want to challenge you to be on the lookout for stumbling blocks. If you find yourself doing less than the right thing, ask yourself, "what's my problem here? What's making it harder for me to follow the rules?" And if you can find a barrier – or a stumbling block – figure out a way to move it aside or get rid of it altogether so that you can get back to work doing what's right. Will you try? Great. Let's pray.

Dear God,

Sometimes life's stumbling blocks can get in our way and make it difficult to follow your example. Help us to find them and to move them out of the way.

Amen

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