

And Jesus Said, "Seriously?!?"

From "The Message" (Mark 9:38-41):

John spoke up, "Teacher, we saw a man using your name to expel demons and we stopped him because he wasn't in our group."

Jesus wasn't pleased. "Don't stop him. No one can use my name to do something good and powerful, and in the next breath cut me down. If he's not an enemy, he's an ally. Why, anyone by just giving you a cup of water in my name is on our side. Count on it that God will notice."

My first pastorate was in Corpus Christi, Texas. At that time, MCC of Corpus Christi was one of three churches that openly welcomed LGBT people into full participation in our community life. The other churches were affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ. Please note I said, "openly welcomed." There were a few other groups who had no real issues with LGBT folk; it was just their denominations didn't officially sanction the openness of these groups.

Early in my pastorate, I learned from one of our UCC friends that shortly before I arrived there was interest in forming a local interfaith group who would focus on poverty issues in South Texas. I asked how we could learn more about how our church could be part of this group. See, our church was located in the second poorest neighborhood in Corpus Christi. Daily we saw first-hand the impact of poverty and an immigration system that didn't--and still doesn't--work.

My friend grew quiet then said, "Well, in one of our organizational meetings I said this was a social justice issue and MCC would be a natural ally. The leader of the group (the leader of a very influential conservative group) said, "Anyone but *them*."

I could just imagine Jesus shaking his head and saying, "Seriously?!?"

Isn't it amazing sometimes how the bible imitates life--or how life imitates the bible?

To me, these two stories are examples of what I call "religious territorialism." That is, "You aren't part of *our* group; and since we own a copyright on the *the* truth, you aren't welcome in our club. Oh, and by the way, no good works you do count anyway. So cut it out!"

Have you ever wondered what the disciples in Mark's story were afraid of? Maybe they were afraid of losing their influence. After all, if just *anyone* could bring healing and hope to the world by simply accessing the power of all that is just, holy, and peaceful, what makes them so special? How would they be able to build a huge following? Perhaps more to the point, how would they be able to cash in on that following? And if you think I'm too far off track, just pick up a bible and read in the gospels how many times Jesus provided attitude checks to his closest followers.

Now, here's a potentially disturbing thought: "Are some of us afraid of losing *our* influence?"

By that comment I mean, "Are some people of all faith traditions so wrapped up in protecting the truth claims of our various traditions that we're missing the big picture?" While we argue about who we

believe is a *real* Christian/Muslim/Jew/Buddhist/Humanist, etc.--who is part of *our* groups and who is not--people who need healing, hope, justice and mercy--people who need a cup of cold water in the name of all that is holy--continue to go thirsty.

And Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Mohammed, Krishna and all that is holy said...

"Seriously?!?"

Blessed Be,
Pastor Danny