

Gospel lesson

We continue in the Gospel of Mark from where we left off last week:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-blindman-jericho/>; credit: LUMO

Mark 9:38-50

(NRSV)

³⁸ 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."

³⁹ 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.

⁴⁰ Whoever is not against us is for us.

⁴¹ 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.

⁴² "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.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁷ 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,

⁴⁸ where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

⁴⁹ "For everyone will be salted with fire.

⁵⁰ 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."

The word of God for the people of God

<Children's time>

<Hymn "Make Me a Servant"

TFWS #2176>

Message: For Such a Time



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/uncommon-wisdom/nineteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/nineteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

God of all time and wisdom, as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please
- speak Your words through my mouth,

- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may live more perfectly aligned with Your will and share Your grace more fully with all. Amen.

We conclude the “Uncommon Wisdom” series today, preparing “For Such a Time”:

“No matter where you are, no matter what is happening in our world, God’s wisdom calls us to listen, to notice, and to enact God’s love in our world for such a time as this.”¹

<Interactive Time>



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/esther-2/>

What do you know of the story of Esther?

<Let them respond>

- Jews in exile from the Promised Land
- Esther prepared for queen by shedding Jewishness
- Uncle Mordecai uncovered plot against king, but later showed ethnic pride which annoyed Haman
- Angry Haman plotted to eliminate disrespectful Jews
- Mordecai asked Esther for help, remember heritage
- Esther took risk, humbled herself before king
- King was pleased by Esther, remembered Mordecai’s help, and punished Haman for his actions

¹ Theme summary taken from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/uncommon-wisdom>.

- Jewish people were saved from genocide; Purim

Esther makes no mention of God, prayer, or religious activities except having the people fast. Why do you think it is included in the Jewish scriptures?

<Let them respond>

There are many facets to this story. One is that Esther, having given up her Jewish identity to become queen, humbly and at great risk resumed her place as one of God's chosen people. What does this say to us about denying our identity? <Let them respond>

In what circumstances do you hide that you are a Christian? Why? <Let them respond>

Although Mordecai arguably created the predicament, he was also the one to remind Esther of her heritage. "Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." (Esther 4:14, *NRSV*)

Have you reminded anyone preoccupied with modern culture about their Christian heritage?
How/when/where? <Let them respond>

Have you ever had to put aside what you thought was the right way of doing things in order to make headway with someone else? <Let them respond>

1	2	3		
S	O	N		
4	E	V		
5	W	E		6
	7	R		

Across
 1. Male offspring
 4. Eggs
 5. _____ and call
 7. Greek letter
 8. ♪ after la

Down
 1. Weave
 2. Above
 3. Large boat
 6. Pond fish

picture from personal creation

Now as I enjoy puzzles, I was going to make you try a brief crossword example here – but I had no guarantee you would do things my way for the illustration to work, so I will just walk you through my point here.

When I do a crossword, the clue “male offspring” brings to mind “son.” Going down, “sew” is not beyond how far a clue like “weave” might make you stretch; “over” fits for “above,” but I cannot think of a 5-letter word beginning with “N” for a large boat.

1	2	3		
B	O	Y		
4	O	V	A	
5	B	E	C	K
	7	R	H	O

Across
 1. Male offspring
 4. Eggs
 5. _____ and call
 7. Greek letter
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Down
 1. Weave
 2. Above
 3. Large boat
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picture from personal creation

I go back to the across words to see if I can fill in the missing letters of 3-down. I know a 3-letter word for “eggs” is “ova” – this is my first indication that I may have entered something wrong. For “_____ and call,” “beck” comes to mind – and going back to 1-down, I realize that for a fighting definition of “weave” the answer could be “bob”.

I was so sure “son” was the correct answer for “male offspring,” but now I see that I have to change that answer to “boy” in order to get 3-down correct with “yacht.” If I did not admit that I was wrong at

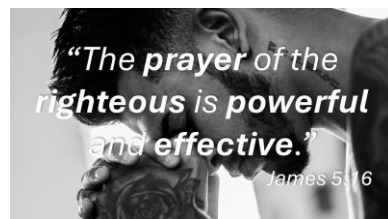
first, I would never be able to solve the puzzle. Fortunately, I had clues to help me understand.

Mordecai had Haman to help him understand that his ego endangered many more than just himself. Haman had Esther to help him understand that his vengeance was an overreaction, unjustifiably cruel. And Esther had Mordecai to remind her to be true to herself, and in remembering her heritage, to save her people.

Like the words of the crossword puzzle, their lives were intertwined and affecting others. And each of our lives today are intertwined with one another's and affecting far more people than we realize.

The psalmist celebrated that the Lord took care of the people when their lives were threatened. Jewish people celebrate Purim every year to celebrate that when their lives were threatened near the end of their exile, God took care of them through Esther.

We celebrate that although the world is threatened by Sin, Jesus took care of us through His death and resurrection and the Holy Spirit keeps taking care of us.



background picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-tattooed-praying-1278566/>;
credit: Ric Rodrigues

James talks about how our prayers are powerful and effective because the Lord takes care of us when we confess our sins and ask for healing.

Note what Jesus emphasizes is most important. It is not being in control of what others do, nor is it being physically capable, but rather our relationship with God that matters most – and because our lives are intertwined, how we affect others' relationships with God. So when we seek healing, it is the healing of relationships we need to give priority.

Only through relationship with our Creator can we have life eternal. If we cause someone to fall away from God, to turn away from what Jesus offers, and to eschew any relationship with the Holy Spirit, we may be guilty of murder before the Lord. God can create the physical, but relationships require choice. No wonder Jesus says it would be better for our physical body to be destroyed than for us to cause anyone to turn away from God!



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/love-relationship-broken-interior-6670110/>; credit: RDNE Stock project

But before anyone starts maiming themselves for past actions, consider this: Jesus came that we might be healed. There is hope for restoration of those relationships in faith and love. The same hand that once cut with a knife may be used to apply a bandage. The same mouth that spouted painful words may be used to soothe an aching heart.

Will you be able to help those you have hurt to heal? Perhaps, or perhaps not. You do not know until you

try. With the way our lives are intertwined, it may be that you help people to heal from wounds inflicted by others' sin. It may be that God has brought you to this time and place to help someone that others in the community cannot, or to give someone purpose in helping you be renewed in ways you did not expect.



picture from

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So let us begin with ourselves.

† As always, start by refocusing on God with prayer, humbling yourself to be honestly open to the Holy Spirit.

† Next, take stock of where you have been insisting things must be done your way (or in a manner to which you have become accustomed) despite someone trying to do things differently.

Ask yourself why you insist on that way – is there another viable way? The answer will probably be yes; is it worth the strain on your relationship to make the other do it your way?

† Look for ways to help the community you are in, be it our fellowship of Christians, the local community, our country, or even the world.

Encourage others to do so as well, that everyone may live better through the love of God. Let God's wisdom guide us through such a time as this.