

BEWARE THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER!

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ September 25, 2016



³⁸ “Teacher,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” ³⁹ “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward. ⁴² “And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea

with a large millstone tied around his neck. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where “‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. ⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.” (Mark 9:38-50)

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

I bet we can relate to the Scripture lessons from this morning. In each of those lessons, God is warning people about jealousy, the green-eyed monster lurking in our hearts, that's quick to point out the perceived unfairness of a situation. Think back to the first lesson, when the people were wandering in the desert, and God, through Moses selected 70 of elders to be leaders among the Israelites. When these 70 were brought out, a very special thing happened, God's Spirit rested upon these men so that they prophesied. But in addition to those 70, two men who were still inside the camp did the very same thing. But who is it that puts a damper on the whole occasion? Joshua. The very man who would lead Israel into the Promised Land complained about these two other men not “following the rules” as it were.

The second lesson we heard was a section from one of Paul's prison letters. This was a letter he wrote from prison. It would have been easy for Paul to write about the unfairness of him being thrown in prison, while others were able to preach freely, some even doing it in a self-seeking manner. But Paul didn't, instead he recognized that Christ was being preached, no matter what the motives of the preacher. The gospel follows suit, where Jesus' disciples got upset about someone else being able to do the things that only they as disciples should have been allowed to do.

It is the green-eyed monster of jealousy that reared its ugly head in each of these situations, and I'm willing to bet you can relate. Perhaps you can relate to the jealous feeling you get when you might look at other “successful” churches with more people in the seats and more dollars in the

bank. Perhaps you can relate to the jealous feeling of seeing someone else do something better than you are able to do it. Or perhaps you're offended that I even suggested that you have a jealous streak in you – because you do. But my point, and the point that God makes in the Bible is not just that the human condition is prone to jealousy, but to beware of it. To BEWARE THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

1. It douses the fire in others
2. It removes the saltiness in self

(1)

It was William Shakespeare in one of his plays that coined the phrase “green-eyed monster” to describe a jealous nature. Jealousy, a cousin to envy, is seen as green, because looking green was an indication of sickness, and jealousy would be a type of sickness. Even though the phrase had not been coined during Jesus' time, jealousy still existed, just as still exists today. And jealousy is dangerous for two basic reasons – it fails to recognize the successes of others, and it diminishes joy in the person's own life. For these reasons BEWARE THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

In our gospel for this morning, we see that green-eyed monster rearing its ugly head specifically in the apostle John. Remember, this is taking place shortly after Jesus has told the disciples to deny themselves, shortly after Jesus has told his disciples to be great by serving others, and still all the disciples can think about is themselves and their position in Jesus' entourage. **“Teacher, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”** I'm sure to many of us, this statement by John sounds very petty. It's like, “Jesus, someone we don't know is doing something that only we should be able to do.” And Jesus' response verifies our thoughts on the pettiness of John's remarks, **“Do not stop him, no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.”**

Pretty easy lesson to learn, right? John was too narrow minded as to the scope of Jesus' disciples. And as such, he was quick to douse the fire in others. He was quick to put down someone who was doing something good in Jesus' name. It's a good thing that doesn't happen anymore today, right? It's a good thing that all Christians get along and don't bicker or quarrel or fight, right? Oh, wait, maybe we still have the same struggles today. Maybe we still are quick to douse the fire in others.

One of the strengths of the Lutheran Church, specifically in our church here at Grace, is the strong commitment to the complete truth of Scripture even when it says something we don't want to hear, even when it seems to defy human reason. But what has a tendency to happen, is to put down every other Christian church. There's a tendency to dismiss the actions and outward success of another Christian church as somehow tainted because they aren't Lutheran. And we're basically acting like John going up to Jesus and saying, “Jesus, tell them to stop doing what they're doing, because they're not one of us!” In our zeal to protect the veracity of Scripture, we can douse the fire in others.

I think for the most part, we have noble intentions, we want God's Word to be kept pure. But I also think, the green-eyed monster of jealousy rears its ugly head, and we can become jealous of the gifts, the accomplishments and the situations of others. And how sad is that? God has given gifts to his church, he has blessed his church with tremendous blessings, to help carry out the message of the gospel to all people. Yet, one of the most successful attacks of Satan, is to use those gifts from God against each other and as reasons to gripe and complain. BEWARE THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER for it douses the fire in others.

But we must do more than just be wary of jealousy in ourselves in the same way that we might be wary of scorpions coming into our houses. We must also recognize those times when it has happened in our life, and we must repent of them and ask for forgiveness. Because this green-eyed monster is not just some minor set-back in our walk with Christ, but it is a fully fledged monster that has the power to drag us kicking and screaming away from our God. This green-eyed monster is serious, because our sin is serious.

(2)

Jesus elaborates how serious our sin is – whether it's the sin of jealousy or not – with the next words he says. **“If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.”** Consider, the extreme measures Jesus implies for someone who causes a little one – either in age or in spiritual maturity – to stumble. Instead of causing them to stumble, a large millstone, weighing hundreds of pounds, should be placed around the neck and they should be thrown into the depths of the sea. That seems like a pretty horrible thing to happen, right? Well in God's eyes, it's even worse for that person to harm another person's faith.

That's how serious God views sin. That's the seriousness that Jesus wanted John to know about. That is the seriousness that Jesus wants us to know about as well. Sin is not just tripping over a stone. Sin is not just a slap on the wrist type of punishment. Sin is something deadly serious. Sin is not some tactic the church uses to keep you on the straight and narrow, sin is something that affects you and where you will spend eternity.

Jesus says it pretty clearly in the verses that follow: **“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off...if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off...if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.” “It is better for you to enter life maimed...crippled...and with one eye, than to be thrown into hell.”** Yet even though Jesus says these words, I'm not sure that we're always listening. Because I'm not sure how serious we are about giving up those things which we enjoy. I'm not sure how serious we are about trying to put down the jealous green-eyed monster. I'm not so sure how serious we are about taking the steps necessary to weed out that evil habit. I'm not so sure how serious we are about letting go of our anger about the world or our worry about the future.

Because it really isn't just about cutting off our hand, our foot or plucking out our eye. Because it is from our heart that those desires come, it is from our mind that those ideas originate. And so it would be necessary to tear out our heart, and to remove our mind, for us to make it to heaven, rather than have our heart and have our mind and be cast into the fires of hell. That's how serious sin is. This seriousness should make it clear that we can't handle this problem on our own, in fact we cannot even help ourselves getting out of this mess.

Which is why God sent a serious Savior to deal with our serious sin. It is the serious Savior who did not douse the fire of those who were proclaiming his name. It is the serious Savior who did not refrain from calling out the seriousness of sin in those near him and those not so near to him. It is the serious Savior who never let the green-eyed monster of jealousy detract him from his mission. It is the serious Savior who took our place under the wrath of God's righteous law. So all of the times we have stumbled, all of the times we have felt jealous, all of the times we have disregarded our own sins as insignificant have been paid for by Jesus.

It is Jesus having taken away our sins that causes us to be different, that causes us to make a change in our lives, which causes us to remove all stumbling blocks in our path or the paths of others. Because we no longer need to concern ourselves with the gifts God has given to others, but rather use the gifts he has given us to the fullest ability. Our success is not judged in eliminating the green-eyed monster from our lives completely (which will never happen this side of heaven), but our success is found in a Savior who completed everything for me.

Does God want people to be committed to his word in truth and purity? Of course he does. But being committed to his Word in its truth and purity does not mean to belittle those who are less understanding of God's Word, it does not mean we minimize our own faults. It means we show love to those who are different – whether physical maturity or spiritual maturity, and all our actions are guided by the peace our Savior gives us. Amen.