

Mark 9:42-50

There are parts of Scripture which we dare not take literally. Revelation, for example, if taken literally and not figuratively can lead a Christian away from the truth of Christ. Here in our text Jesus' words must not be taken literally. If they are, Christians will practice self-mutilation, cutting off hands and feet and tearing out eyes, and millstones will be in big demand.

Jesus uses some pretty graphic language here. Is He angry? He seems to be. He sounds like a mafia boss giving orders. But we must grasp the point He is making. His words are a stern warning, yet we see love and mercy at the heart of them.

Perhaps we can approach them in this way... What do you do with a wild horse? Those who have the training will tame the horse. Until it is tamed it has a mind and will of its own. We might be in awe of it seeing it run free. Yet we cannot ride it. We have no control over it. The horse does what he wants, not what we want him to do.

Just so, it is imperative that we tame the members of our body. We must not allow the parts of our body to run free and do what they want. They must be tamed. They must be kept in control. Why? So that they do not lead us into sin.

You're a Christian. You are baptized into Christ. You belong to Him, therefore. And He does not want to lose you. He loves you too much. It is a lie of the devil to think, "once in grace, always in grace." We can lose our saltiness, says Jesus. We can fall from grace.

Our bodies, like wild horses, want to run wherever they want to go and do whatever they want to do, and this is a serious danger to us. Look at your hands. If they are not tamed they will cause you to sin. Look at your feet. They will lead you into sin unless they are controlled. Look at your eyes (so to speak). Unless they are tamed they will cause you to sin.

Your body parts, all of them, and mine, are wild horses. And many people are proud of this fact. They like to run free. They do not want to be tamed. This rebel spirit dwells in all of us to some extent. And at its root it breaks the First Commandment. We do not want God to be our God. We want to be our own god. We want to live like wild horses.

But listen to Jesus' stern warning. He speaks it out of love for us. "If your hand...your foot...your eye causes you to sin, cut it off (tear it out), so that you are not thrown into hell."

Who me? Is He speaking to me? If He is not speaking to you then He does not love you. Who of us is never tempted? Who of us has never yielded our body parts to sin? Who of us is not guilty? And speaking of guilt, that millstone thing, who of us has never caused a little one to sin? I am as guilty as you. Not one of us can claim innocence.

But then how, just how do we tame our wild horses? We don't. We can't. But God can and does. "Create in me a clean heart, O God," is our cry. And herein lies the real issue. The problem is not so much with our hands, feet, and eyes. The problem is with our heart. Sin dwells in the heart. You and I were sinners in our mother's womb even before we developed hands, feet, and eyes.

Cutting off body parts now will not remove the problem. We need a clean heart. We need a heart that loves God and not sin.

In your baptism God gave you this heart. As the Divine Surgeon He cut away the power of sin over you and put His own heart within you. He forgave you. He cleansed you. He declared you to be holy and innocent.

Problem solved? Yes...and no. Yes, for now we are in Christ. Now we are His saints. Now Christ who is in you is greater than the power of sin in your life.

But no, because of our fallen nature. Our sinful flesh stays with us until the end. We are weak..at best. We give in so easily to sin. We set our horses free to run wild time after time.

But how do you tame a wild horse? Not by forcing it into submission. By speaking to its heart. By loving the horse and having it trust you.

This is how Jesus tames our wild horses. He doesn't force you to love Him. He speaks to your heart. He loves you with all that He is. He went to the cross and wore the millstone of your guilt around His own neck. He was cut in His hands and feet for you. His eyes hurt as the blood from His head trickled down into them.

Rather than turning your eyes toward that which is sinful, look to the cross. See your God there dying for you. He is pure love. Look to your baptism. Hear Him who is pure love speaking to your heart. He speaks as to a wild horse, and He causes you to trust Him and love Him because His words to you are pure mercy and grace.

Look to the Sacrament on the altar. Have your hands, feet, and eyes been wild horses running free last week? He does not punish you. He forgives you. Here in this Sacrament is His forgiveness. He comes to you and saddles Himself upon you to ride you through life; to control you and tame you; to love you, for His love is that which controls us.

There is no one here who has been too wild a horse that all hope for you is gone. If your saltiness is gone, God can restore it. Why do you think He brought you here today? To please Him? To give Him something? No, He brought you here to speak to your heart; to forgive you; to tell you the truth that there is hope for you.

So don't leave here and set your horses free. God loves you too much for you to do that. You are one, are you not, who has been tamed by Christ? You can live, therefore, in a new way, with His love controlling you. Amen.