

John and the disciples report to Jesus that they have seen someone casting out demon in Jesus' name. They tried to stop him because, in essence, he was not one of "us." Now, there are folks who think people can be separated into two groups, and folks who think they can't. John and the disciples are in the first group. They think the world can be divided into "us" and "them." Jesus is in the second group, which ironically isn't a second group at all. For Jesus, there is only "us."

In this short reading, we see people like me, and perhaps you too, once again not quite getting the point. In the passage immediately before this reading, Jesus has told them "Whoever welcomes a child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

But it seems that the disciples missed the word "whoever." Maybe they thought they heard Jesus saying, "Whoever of *you* folks" or maybe they thought he meant to say, "Whoever has been properly trained and certified." Or maybe "Whoever gets the right schooling; whoever the church has ordained." Some of them likely thought they heard something like, "Whoever it is that you happen to approve of."

But instead of chastising them, Jesus just redraws the circle of inclusion for them. But wider. Now, Jesus add *whoever* gives you a cup of water to drink. Instead of lecturing them, he gives them another way to hear. Jesus expands his earlier point about "whoever welcomes in my name" by providing a negative version: "No one who works a miracle in my name..."

Jesus tells them very clearly that they should not try to stop such a person because they, in fact, are in alignment with God's actions in the world. "No one who works a miracle in my name is likely to speak evil of me."

Here's what can be tricky for 21st c. ears: when Jesus says "in my name," he does not mean simply the mechanical, literal and magical reciting of specific syllables. If that were true, we'd be far more familiar with "Yeshua," the pronunciation of his name the way his parents gave it to him.

Instead, speaking in the name of Jesus means to speak "aligned with" or "loyal to," or perhaps even more mystically, "bonded with" the honor, status and vocation of Jesus Christ, and through our brother, the Son of God, to the honor, status and vocation of the One who sent him.

The historical Jesus patiently teaching the disciples here did not promote an "us and them" world. The Risen Christ still unites us and

invites us to experience a world that is, can I say: “us-and-those-who-are-not-us-but-are-also-aligned-with-God's-love-justice-and-mercy-for-the-world”? Learning to see “those-who-are-not-us-but-are-also-aligned-with-God's-love” is how we can keep a leash on our human tendency toward self-righteousness, exclusivity and complacency. Discovering Christ in whoever it is that may be offering a cup of water will humble and delight us with new people to be grateful for.

As if to put a lovely bow on the whole notion, Jesus says quite clearly: “Whoever is not against us is for us.” We too often hear it the other way around, but what Jesus says is: “Whoever is *not against* us is *for us*.” That’s the principle for us to learn and embrace. Fortunately, we have help.

“Wisdom,” as we heard in the first reading from Ecclesiasticus, “Wisdom teaches her children and gives help to those who seek her. *Whoever* [there’s that inclusive word again!] *Whoever* loves [Wisdom] loves life, and those who seek her from early morning are filled with joy. *Whoever* holds her fast inherits glory, and the Lord blesses the place she enters. Those who serve her minister to the Holy One; the Lord loves those who love her.”

The insight of this wisdom reading is that God works through all kinds of people – Christians, Jews, Muslims; people of other religions and people of no religion. Even some people who self-describe as anti-religious. Why be resentful of others acting and working in ways that produce fruits of Spirit? Why not be joyful instead when we encounter Buddhists or secular humanists, Hindus or Mormons – *whoever* – serving others out of love? Increasing fruits of the Spirit from all quarters is just more evidence of the dawning of the Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven. Where there is love, where there is *service* done for love, there is God.

To bear the name of Christ is not simply to belong to a group called “Christians.” To bear the name of Christ is to recognize our solidarity with others in all acts of peace and love, justice and mercy, beauty and freedom, truth and loyalty. The presence of Christ can be found in all these actions.

The church provides openings for God to pour heaven into earth; she is not the end herself. She is a path to finding God and a sign of God’s Kingdom; she is not the totality of God’s Kingdom. You and I and all of God’s Holy Church work alongside *whoever* is aligned with God’s love as God brings the full realization God’s Kingdom to fruition.

That, sisters and brothers in Christ, is a name worth bearing.