

September 30, Ordinary 26B (Mark 9:38-50)

Jesus is pretty clear: we should mind our own spiritual business.

by [Rachael Keefe](#) in the [September 12, 2018](#) issue

Some days I think that the church has learned so little of what Jesus endeavored to teach us. We've become very good at saying "I'm not *that* kind of Christian" from every side of the things that divide us. Jesus has something radical to say about those who might be doing things a bit differently than the Twelve and their group: "Whoever is not against us is for us."

Several years ago, when GPS mapping devices were still relatively new, my wife and I drove from New Hampshire to Maryland. On the way down, GPS kept us on course with no issues. On the way home, however, traffic was heavy in New York City, and the GPS voice (which we call "Map Lady") told us to get off the highway. We thought Map Lady might take us around the traffic, so we obligingly took the exit she indicated. Before we knew it, we were at Map Lady's mercy; we didn't know where we were or how to get back to the highway. She took us by the entrance to the Bronx Zoo before eventually leading us back to the same traffic-jammed highway, just a couple miles ahead of where we exited almost an hour before. We still have no idea why Map Lady took us on a slightly guided tour of the Bronx. But this has become the measure for deciding whether to follow Map Lady or stay the course. We don't want another Bronx Zoo incident.

When the disciples tattle to Jesus about those other folks who are healing in Jesus' name, they are in danger of taking an unnecessary detour off the main route. In my mind, they sound like the child who sat behind me in third grade and told the teacher every time I colored outside the lines. Can you hear them? *Jesus?* they say. He ignores them, because he knows what's coming. *Jesus*, a little louder and a little more insistent. Then, *Jesus!* He turns to them impatiently, and they intone with that know-it-all edge, *Jesus! Those people over there, you know, the ones we don't know? Well, they are healing and casting out demons, but not the way we do it. Make them stop before they ruin everything.*

Like many who are certain of their right(eous)ness, the disciples are likely shocked when Jesus doesn't immediately take their side. They are trusting their own egos, or their need to be right. I don't think they realize they are stepping off the holy path, not even when Jesus lays it out quite clearly. They have no idea that they are heading to the Bronx Zoo for no good reason.

Jesus essentially tells them to worry about themselves, not what others are doing—especially when those other folks are doing nothing against Jesus. In fact, if they continue on their detour, they might end up anchored to a millstone in a rising tide (an outcome far worse than a pointless detour in the middle of an already long drive).

Let go of what is not yours to carry, because your hands were meant for holy work. Stop chasing after what your neighbors have; your feet were meant for another road. And if you are staring into anything other than the realm of God, refocus right now—because you cannot have what you cannot envision. Stop expending so much energy comparing yourself to anyone other than the person God created you to be. You do you, as is often said these days, and let everyone else be who they are. They probably aren't against you.

When enough of us fail to be who we were created to be, the body of Christ is in danger of becoming saltless salt. And if we lose our salt, we lose so much more than time. We lose our identity, our purpose, our value. The church becomes like so much sand. The world does not need more sand. The world needs salt—to enhance flavors, to preserve food that will nurture us in the days to come, to keep us vital in a world that feels like it might just be on one massive detour.

Jesus is pretty clear that we need to be minding our own spiritual business. It's easy to forget or ignore this principle for living as a follower of Christ. Being distracted by others who are different from us but not against us is a poor use of our resources. Worse, others might stumble after us, and we'll all end up in a big mess that doesn't bring the realm of God any closer.

"Whoever is not against us is for us." Why take a detour to tattle on others who are doing it differently? Why risk losing everything just to be right? Jesus has shown us the way to embody love, to create the relationships that are the foundation for the realm of God. Perhaps the time has come to show the world what kind of Christians we are rather than proclaim what we are not.