

John said, "there was a man driving out demons in your name, Jesus, but we told him to stop, because he is not one of us."

How many times have we heard that? "they're not one of us." "You're not from around here, are ya?"

Once upon a time some people got tired of being treated badly in their country of origin, so they set sail upon the waters to find a new land. They conquered this land, drove the natives into small reservations, created a new country with new rules about equality and freedom—though some were more equal and free than others.

Two hundred some-odd years later political candidates line up to curse and denigrate immigrants. "Expel them all! Send them back where they came from! They're criminals, terrorists! We don't want them here! They're not our people!" and the native Americans stand back with their arms folded saying "we who pale face? Yeah, send them all back."

He's not one of us.

One evening a stranger entered a church, sat with them through their Bible study, then shot and killed 9 of them because of the color of their skin, wanting to start a race war.

She's not like us.

Refugees flooded the borders of the United States earlier this year, many of them children, trying to escape civil war and gangs. Refugees flood from Syria and the violence of war that has destroyed their homes and livelihoods. They're turned away, or sent back, or drown in dark waters of the sea.

They aren't our concern.

A few years ago a group of Presbyterian pastors who were disgruntled at various things they saw as being wrong with the PCUSA came together to call for reform and/ or a parting of the ways. Eventually a new denomination was formed. Churches left the denomination over changes in doctrine. Beyond that, there are churches that insist that their baptism is the only baptism. That their doctrine is the only correct doctrine.

Those people, they aren't like us.

How long, O Lord, will we do this to each other? How long will we play this game of "us vs. them? How long will we let fear of the other rule our thinking, how long will we live from a paradigm of scarcity rather than the abundance that God has promised for all of God's children?

I mean, could we not even get beyond the crucifixion before we're playing the us vs. them game? Even the disciples played it among themselves, arguing which was the greatest, which would be highest in the kingdom.

To Jesus' words about welcoming the "little ones"—children, widows, strangers, the oppressed, John the disciple replies with "we stopped this one from acting in your name because he wasn't one of us." Not our brand. Not our team. Not in our group.

I was a chubby kid, awkward and shy. By Jr. High cliques and in-groups (and out groups) had formed. I wasn't really in any groups, certainly not part of the in group. A boy liked me, and he was nice but even less a part of the in crowd as I was. I am embarrassed to say that I was embarrassed to be seen with him, so I broke up with him.

He isn't one of us.

But I have news, my friends, I have good news: Jesus isn't like that. Jesus doesn't play favorites, especially when it comes to the inbreaking of the kingdom of God. "If they aren't against us, they're for us." says Jesus. "If they even so much as give you a cup of cold water in my name they are part of the kingdom." Here is what Jesus has to say about "us vs. them": It would be better for you to die than to put obstacles in the way of anyone who would be in my kingdom.

It would be better for you to die

He's not one of us

They aren't like us.

Criminals, thieves and rapists.

Terrorists.

They have dark skin. They're poor. They'll take what we have and we'll be out on the street.

How often do we put obstacles in front of the "little ones" that Jesus is talking about? And I don't just mean children, although children are included.

Think about all of those people out there who don't go to church, who have dropped out or who never started coming in the first place. The "Nones" who claim no religious affiliation (though they might say they believe in God or some form of higher power.) The "Dones" who have dropped out because they're burned out, worn out from trying to keep a dying tradition alive. The ones who hear the rhetoric of hate and fear that comes, if we're honest, from all directions--- left, right and in between—and say, I just can't be a part of all that anger, all that distrust, all that hate.

What do you think—do you think those people know they're loved by God? Are they able to see the love of Jesus through the rhetoric of hate and fear?

What about those for whom hate speech is a regular thing? And again, I'm not talking about anyone specific, just anyone who spreads bad news like a plague.

Do they know they're loved by God? Because it seems to me if you know that God loves you, it would be impossible to speak so ill of others.

Jesus started a movement—a movement that wasn't really new (it was straight out of the Torah, after all)—but a movement based on the ethic of love for God and love for neighbor that at least equals love of self.

Jesus started a movement, it hadn't even grown into a *church* yet and the disciples were arguing about who was the best and who counted as a follower.

Who counted. In God's eyes, everyone counts. Even neighbors who are addicted and scary looking. Even neighbors who are brown skinned and speak a different language, and have a different religion. Even neighbors who make mistakes, neighbors who live in the world of us vs. them. Until we believe that, we'll never be able to look someone in the eye and say, you are loved.

How about you? Do you know you're loved by God? Are you able to believe that in Jesus Christ, you are gifted with the grace of God, brought back into right relationship with God, your broken places made whole?

Because it is in this way that we are all alike.

We're all broken in some way or other.

We may not feel broken, or recognize our own brokenness. But we are. Over and over we're broken by the world around us, by what has come before us and what we experience every day.

But we are also loved with a passion that heals the broken places, that renews our spirits and lifts our hearts. Do you believe this? When you burned your papers, did you feel the burden of that confession removed from your heart?

Because it's only if we believe this ourselves that we can tell other people. It's only if we believe this ourselves that we can break free of the 'us vs. them' mentality of the world. If we are sure of God's love for us, then how can we be afraid of 'the other'? How can we be afraid of sharing our faith? How can we cling to our idea of scarcity any longer and ignore God's ethic of abundance?

What if we started a movement—a movement of love, of abundant love. What if we shared the love of God with the community around us? What would that look like? Maybe a little scary—we might look like Jesus freaks. We might be laughed at. But think of the possibilities: Who would we meet? How would we greet them? What if we shared God's love with them and they in turn shared it with someone else? Even if they didn't come to church with us, if they are not against us, they are for us.

Let's start a movement. Will you join me? Will you join Jesus?

Amen.