

Jesus doesn't do tribes.

No, I am not maligning aboriginal tribal units, or the founding tribes of Israel. But it seems our world—at home and abroad—is marked by a kind of “tribalism” fostered by social and broadcast media alike; groups of mutually hostile people viewing themselves as the pure, the true and right ones who are beleaguered, threatened by outsiders—by ethnic, political or cultural groups who have usurped what is “ours”. And this is not of God.

In the Gospel, John leads breathless disciples to tell Jesus that someone is stealing their thunder. “We saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him”.

Why on earth would they try to prevent someone from casting out demons? In the Bible, demons wreak havoc on all kinds of people; Jesus spends a great deal of his ministry liberating victims of demonic possession and all its horrific effects. Children thrown into fire; men howling in the wilderness, dropping to the ground shrieking and convulsing; a woman infested with seven demons—the torment they bring is so dire, so obvious, that casting them out becomes one of the hallmarks of the Kingdom. Demons are utter evil: casting them out is good. Shouldn't they be telling him that something great has happened? What is bad about doing good? And doing it in Jesus' name seems to imply faith in Jesus. So many times Jesus has commended people for their faith...

But, of course, that is their point: he may have been doing it in Jesus' name, but *he doesn't follow us*. He's an outsider, an Other. He's diluting the brand “disciple”.

That is more important than any good work he may be doing, or the faith that allows him to cast out those demons in Jesus' name. He's just not one of *Us*.

And Jesus is having none of it. “Do not prevent him... Whoever is not against us is for us.” Anyone who does the word of the Kingdom in the smallest way— who so much as “offers a cup of water because you belong to Christ” is part of the Kingdom, is sure of reward. That goes against the grain of human nature, doesn't it? There's something about the human ego, left to its own devices, that wants to form a club, an in-group of “us” distinct from “them”, and to see “them” as opposed to us, inferior to “us”.... that makes us see the world as a zero-sum game.

We see that in the first reading where Joshua zealously wants Moses to stop the two elders who are prophesying outside the tent of the Presence—even though they were on Moses' list. How quickly we form ourselves into “them” and “us”!

We deface the world when we do this. And we become a counter-witness.

Many years ago, during the “troubles” Ireland, a friend of mine who had grown up on a kibbutz in Israel came up to me waving a newspaper. He had literally grown up without contact with Christians, and I was his first close Christian friend, so I had become his go-to source of Christian information. In the paper were two photos. One was of a young Catholic woman who had been tarred and feathered and tied to a lamp post by “Catholics” (nationalists) to punish her for dating a Protestant boy. The other was the battered body of the boy, also tied to a lamp post.

So—Catholics and Protestants—both are Christians, right? He asked me.

“Yes.”

“So ... both sides follow Christ, right?”

“Yes.”

“Both read the Bible, right?”

“Yes”

“Well—if this stuff were true, how could they treat each other this way?????”

God loves everyone. No exceptions, no limits. The Kingdom is vast, and all are welcome. In God there are no out-groups, no strangers, no Others. We are called to love as God loves, that God who “makes the rain to fall on the just and unjust alike”, who entered in to our lives to bring every one of us into Christ’s own divine, risen life.

If we can realize this, if we truly *get* it into our hearts and act on it, we can become channels of God’s healing love into a world that so desperately needs it. And we will find ourselves living the joy and peace of God’s Kingdom, where there are no Others, no Outsiders, no tribes—just beloved daughters and sons sharing joy.