

The Gospel reading for today is jam packed with sermons. I mean, just look at it!

Mark 9:38-40

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said,

"Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.

For the one who is not against us is for us." (repeat)

There's certainly a sermon in that!

How about 41-42?

For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.

- Those who give to God's people are blessed.
- Little ones believe in Jesus!
- Better not get between those little ones and Jesus!

That's 3 sermons right there!

And then 43-48...

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.

It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire...

- Jesus uses hyperbole to show the futility of this life compared to eternity.
- Hell is real and is to be avoided at all costs!

2 more sermons!

And 49-50...

For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again?

Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Salt, fire and peace!

One little reading and somewhere between 7 and 10 sermons! I know you've missed me the last 2 weeks, but I thought I'd better restrict myself to only 1 sermon today.

The one that jumped out at me was from the middle section when Jesus tells us to get rid of anything that prevents us from being his faithful disciples and enjoying the abundant life he has called us to.

Get rid of anything that causes you to sin! He has made it clear that what comes out of a man, from his heart, is what causes him to sin.

Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Your hands, feet and eyes only do what your heart tells them to do. If you find yourself enslaved to sin, your heart needs to be changed. Only God can do that.

We must surrender control to the Holy Spirit, who has the power to cleanse us, free us from slavery to sin and enable us to live for God.

It is the Holy Spirit that enables us to get rid of that stuff.

Think about it this way...

When a house is put on the market, many real estate agents bring in stagers.

These stagers begin their work by clearing the stage.

And how do they do this? They walk around your house and point at things — end tables, rugs and decorations — and they say, ***“Edit. Edit. Edit.”***

What they mean is, ***Get rid of it.***

The house will be more appealing to potential buyers if it is not cluttered with unnecessary furniture and other stuff.

But might that also be true for those currently living in the house?

And might our cluttered house be indicative of a cluttered life that prevents us from living and following Jesus the way we really want to?

You see, our hearts can also be trapped by love of possessions!

Perhaps we can learn from the Swedish tradition of **döstädning**.

Pull out your Swedish dictionary.

Dö is “death” and städning is “cleaning,” so if you put the two together you get **“death cleaning.”**

It means that you remove unnecessary things to make your house nice and orderly, especially when you think that the end of your life is getting close.

Margareta Magnusson wrote a book about this called,

The Gentle Art of Swedish Death cleaning.

She writes,

“For me, death cleaning means going through all my belongings and deciding how to get rid of the things I do not want anymore.”

She knows that many things have been around for so long that we do not even see or value them anymore. Others are packed away so tightly that we can hardly close our drawers or shut our closet doors.

“When that happens it is definitely time to do something, even if you are only in your thirties. You could call that kind of cleaning *döstädning*, too, even if you may be many, many years away from dying.”

For generations, adult children have agreed to take their aging parents' possessions — whether they wanted them or not. But now, the **anti-clutter movement has met the anti-brown-furniture movement**, and the combination is sending dining room sets, sterling silver flatware, and knick-knacks straight to thrift stores or the curb.

And feelings are getting hurt, as adult children who are eager to minimize their own belongings — and who may live in small spaces and entertain less formally than their parents did — are increasingly saying “no thanks” to the family heirlooms.

The way to prevent such hurt feelings is to deal with your stuff yourself, before it's too late.

I think Jesus is challenging us to approach our lives the same way.

Jesus challenges us to do a kind of **“death cleaning”** by removing from our lives the sinful actions and attitudes that cause us to stumble. The phrase **“causes you to stumble”** is a translation of the Greek verb **σκανδαλιζω**, which carries over into English as **“scandalize.”** Jesus is saying that if your hands or feet scandalize you — causing you to sin or trip or fall away — stop using your hands and feet in this way.

So what kind of scandalizing might this include?

If you use your hands for anything that hurts yourself or others, **delete it!**

Get rid of it!

Replace it with something that is healthy and productive and brings you closer to God and others!

If your feet take you to places where you really shouldn't go, because they are places that do damage to our bodies, our souls and our relationships, **stop going there!**

- Alcoholics are scandalized by bars,
- gambling addicts are scandalized by casinos and
- married people can be scandalized by places and situations that tempt them to be unfaithful.

Delete them!

Instead, use your feet to take you to places that are good for you and for the people you love.

We live in a visual culture today, with tantalizing images all around us.

Temptations appear on our computer screens, smartphones, televisions and in the pages of glossy magazines. Perhaps our eyes are drawn to designer fashions, luxury cars, social media postings or pornography. If these images scandalize you,

delete them!

Get rid of them. Don't let the things you see cause you to stumble.

Instead, let your eyes, the lamp of the body, bring into your mind and heart those things that are:

true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise!

Jesus is not really asking us to destroy our hands, feet and eyes, but instead to get rid of the destructive things we do with our hands, feet and eyes. The point here is that we are supposed to **cut off certain behaviors, not body parts!**

Although that is exactly what Aron Ralston did.

Perhaps you remember the film 127 Hours, in which the 27-year-old Ralston finds himself trapped in a canyon, with his right arm pinned by a boulder against a rock wall. He has only a little bit of water, two burritos and a few chunks of chocolate. Knowing that he will surely die in the canyon, he uses his small knife to cut off his arm and escape.

The movie is based on a true story, and it begins by depicting Ralston as an overconfident loner who believes that he is invincible. But the experience in the canyon changes him — for the better. Although he loses his arm, he gains the knowledge that he was kept alive by the love of others, by his relationships with

family and friends and by his dependence on them. Looking back, he says that he went through the experience and realized,

“Well, God is love, and love is what kept me alive and that love is what got me out of there.”

Sometimes, for some people, cutting off the behaviors that cause us to stumble may seem as difficult as cutting off an arm! But hanging on to sinful attitudes and actions that scandalize us and cause us to stumble lead us down to the road to destruction.

God is love, and His love is what keeps us alive. Jesus knows that these changes are not easy; in fact, he says that **“everyone will be salted with fire,”** which sounds like a terribly painful experience.

Author Glennon Melton wrote,

“A whole new — and necessary — way to see your messy house,”

Recently I posted a picture of myself in my kitchen, and I immediately started receiving generous messages from people wanting to help me “update” it. Along with their messages came pictures of how my kitchen could look, if I’d just put some effort and money into it.

I’ve always loved my kitchen, but after seeing those pictures I found myself looking at it through new, critical eyes. Maybe it was all wrong. Maybe the ’80s counters, laminate cabinets, mismatched appliances and clutter really were mistakes I should try to fix. I stood and stared and suddenly my kitchen looked shabby and lazy to me. I wondered if that meant I was shabby and lazy, too.

Because our kitchens are nothing if not reflections of us, right? I decided I'd talk to Craig and make some calls about updates.

But as I lay down to sleep, I remembered this passage from Thoreau's Walden:

"I say, beware of all enterprises that require new clothes, and not rather a new wearer of clothes."

Walden reminds me that when I feel lacking — I don't need new things, I need new eyes with which to see the things I already have.

Paul tells us in **Colossians 3:1–4**

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

- **Get your mind right!**
- **Get it focused on God and eternity.**
- **Get it focused on love and relationships.**
- **Don't get scandalized by actions and attitudes that lead you away from God and towards destruction.**
- **Don't get enslaved by stuff.**
- **Don't let clutter prevent you from having the joyful abundant life that Christ calls you to!**

Colossians 3:16–17

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom,

singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, in word or deed,

do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

In a world of abundant distractions and temptations, we need to do the kind of death cleaning that Jesus recommends. It keeps us alive, at peace with one another and in touch with the God who loves us and saves us from every kind of trouble.