

The first thing that comes into my mind when hearing these words of Jesus is “well, you have to be pretty clumsy for your hand to cause you to stumble.” The metaphors and hyperbole come rushing at us in this Gospel. I think Jesus reverts to extreme exaggeration out of frustration with his disciples who after a long time and many instructions are still arguing about who is the greatest and who will be allowed into their exclusive circle. It was their way of being

And today we hear Jesus say “who ever is not against us is for us,” and I say you can even be against yourself, when it comes to right relationship with God and with your neighbor.

In the time Mark wrote, persecution may have encouraged a “tightening” of the circle of community and fostered uncertainty about who can be trusted. Informers could be dangerous. It seems to have been a very complicated matter to determine who was for and who was against the Christian community.

Yet, to his time and to ours, Mark recalls Jesus' urgings toward an inclusive, hospitable community, where "the belief that "whoever is not against us is for us" opens doors and encourages partnerships in spreading the Gospel.

I think the thing that bothers me the most about the words of Jesus today is that I know so many of you are here, and I am thankful that you are, so many of you are searching for a comforting word or an acknowledgement of how hard life in Christ can be and yet here are words that cut us to the core.

We are not simply learning about self-mutilation and sacrifice here; we are hearing of the dangers of keeping someone , including ourselves, from a relationship with our Lord. We are hearing a warning to the organized faithful of being too rigid- too focused on in's and out's, and who is doing what and how.

And it helps me to remember that yes, my eye has caused me to stumble and to block others on their spiritual path. Just like while hiking, if I don't pay attention to where I am going on my spiritual journey Or I get too preoccupied with the person beside me and what he or she is doing I stumble and fall and I have the memories of bruises and the actual scars to prove it.

Jesus reminds his followers again not to be barriers to another person living out their own authentic call. Consider the implications of the disciples attitude about the healing if the term "little ones" refers to someone new to our faith. Here is this person who has just performed a powerful act of healing in Jesus' name. The person is, in word and deed, a believer. I wonder Would that person or those witnessing the events join the community of which the disciples belong given their attitude?

In this time of transition I think it is important to ask ourselves if the way we walk, the way we speak, the way we view newcomers or the works of our hands sends messages similar to the attitude of the disci-

ples to those who might want to join us? Are we healers, as salt water is to wounds or are we big impassable boulders to those "others" wanting to share their spiritual journey with us?

It is good for us to reflect with your fellow Emmanuel members on how this faith community welcomes those who may not sound or look like us. We live in a day and age where people are hungry, the salt of the earth people are looking for a way to become closer to Christ, to hear his life story and to understand the grace offered through it. People are searching for meaning in their lives. The Good News is: Jesus reminds us that if someone does not look or sound or walk the religious walk like us we should , in God's name, cast out those prejudices within ourselves. Because Our hearts should not be barriers of faith but open doors to love.

Amen