Sermon September 26, Mark 9, 38-50
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I'm sure all of us have all thought at one time or another that we are the *only person* capable of doing a particular task—at home or at work. I know I have. Sometimes one of the hardest things is to acknowledge that someone else can do that task as well as or even better than ourselves.

In Mark's Gospel today, we find ourselves in the middle of a heated scene about this very point.

The disciples come to Jesus with a problem. They tell Jesus that they saw someone casting out demons in his name. Someone NOT part of their group. How dare he! So of course, they tried to stop him.

We hear words from Jesus that we don't often associate with the son of God.

He warns his disciples against being 'thrown into hell', where there is an 'unquenchable fire' and that it might be better for them if they cut their feet and hands off rather than stop someone from performing deeds in his name.

Strong words indeed, and exaggerated, so that Jesus can make his point. And as always when Jesus is agitated, there is purpose to his anger. Purpose, rooted in love.

Anyone who does a deed in my name is with me, he says. Never try to stop anyone from coming to me, especially the little ones.

His point is clear.

The disciples must let go of their attachment to their own status, and some of their power. They must become childlike, resting in Jesus, accepting that his invitation to fullness of life is given, not just to them, but to all.

Letting go can't have been easy, especially when the disciples' identity may have been a bit wrapped up in the role they saw themselves playing. After all, they were sort of the 'rebel rock stars' of their day. With special responsibilities, power even, as part of Jesus's inner circle.

But in the Bible spreading responsibilities is shown to work well for everyone. We also see this in today's Old Testament reading.

In this scene we see Moses, exhausted by all his duties, pleading with God for help. 'I can't do this all on my own!" he says.

God shows that he does not expect him to do it alone, and he gathers 70 elders of Israel and spreads his spirit upon them, lightening the load of work so that it doesn't all lie on Moses.

Everyone benefits. Moses can focus on what he is good at, while the other leaders can develop their skills and flourish. There is room for all.

This spreading of responsibility is seen by some theologians as an important aspect of Christian teaching. Because it encourages people to really listen to each other and to engage with one another even if there is a difference in approach. Spreading responsibility can also bridge social divides, and build trust.

It's an outlook that places the *common good* above the personal ego and the need for validation.

This common good is one of the great attractions of participating in a church. To feel, in the depths of our being, a shared commitment towards a *common life*.

To connect with people outside our small circles and to express solidarity with each other, as have done throughout this period of upheaval across our country. At St Peter's, we do this by praying together for the more beautiful world we know is possible.

In the spirit of today's Letter from James, who urges us to pray, let us pray together now.

Dear God,

Thank you for where we are on our journey and for our journey ahead.

We know that this is not by accident, but by your intimate design for each of us.

Help us to listen to what is being constantly revealed through your loving presence.

And teach us to be open to the common good, as we enter ever more deeply into relationship with You.

AMEN.