

Cut off your hand! Cut off your foot! Pluck out your eye! These are just a few of our Lord's suggestions on how to deal with sin. So after service today, anyone wishing to lose a limb or an eye can come forward for the first annual body part removal service here at north Ellsworth. It will likely be a little messy, so we might need a little extra janitorial work done around the church this week. But regardless come forward and lose a limb!

It sounds ridiculous doesn't it? The idea of losing an arm or a leg or an eye just because of a little sin in our lives. Most people explain away this verse away very quickly with the explanation that Jesus simply wasn't talking literally in our text. Our stomachs are made queasy even by the thought of doing what Jesus suggests. So we calm them with the idea that Jesus words are just too ridiculous to be taken as literal. In our society of advertisements that tend to over exaggerate, we do with Jesus words what we do with those advertisements. We flip the channel so to speak. We flip to another part of the bible and try to find something that seems a little more reasonable. Surely Jesus can't be serious! Cut off a hand! Cut off a foot! Pluck out an eye! That's ridiculous. It could kill you to do one of those things.

No doubt Jesus often talked in parables and in imagery. But what about here? Is there a chance that in our text Jesus isn't over exaggerating, that he might truly suggest such radical actions for his followers? There is a clear pattern that emerges as we study the life of Jesus. He speaks to the crowds in parables, and explains things clearly when he is alone with his disciples. He has been saying things lately to his disciples that seem ridiculous to them. He told them that he, the Messiah, had to be rejected and die. "Surely he wasn't being literal," they must have wanted to believe. But Jesus meant exactly what he said. He had to die quite literally. So what about our text? Jesus here again is teaching his inner circle of disciples. So it seems that unless Jesus gives us some reason to know that he is not speaking literally, we should assume that that he is. And in our text, he gives no clue that he is about to begin talking figuratively.

But if Jesus meant what he said, shouldn't we be a church full of dismembered individuals? Well, let us understand clearly what Jesus says. He says that if one particular body part of yours has so much control over you that it causes you to sin continually, you should get rid of it. He doesn't say that the first time a body part causes you to sin, it needs to be amputated. But he does say that if you have a part of you that has control over

you that it is the reason for repeated sin, it needs to go. Why? Because sin must be taken seriously. Sin wherever it exists separates one from God. And what Jesus warns today is that sin left unchecked can end us up in hell itself, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. Sin is that serious. So Jesus says it is better to be maimed and in heaven than burning in hell with all your parts intact. Whatever it is that separates us from God must be separated from our lives. And yes, if that means that a foot has to go or a hand, so be it.

For the most part though, it truly isn't body parts that cause us to sin. It is generally other things. But the message from Jesus is the same. Whatever separates you from God must be separated from your life. Does your internet connection lead you to places where you should not be? Cut the phone line. Does the bottle of liquor cause you to end up in gross sin? Throw it out. Does a certain group of friends always end up getting you into situations where you sure wouldn't want God to find you? Stop hanging out with them. We must take sin that seriously. As James says today in our epistle, we are to resist the devil, cleanse our hands, and purify our hearts. Because while losing a hand or foot might get us killed, the sin it causes might get us eternal death, eternal separation from God in hell. This is how serious God takes sin in the Christian life.

You might think that your Pastor today has forgotten about the death of our Lord for our sins and his resurrection from the dead. But I can assure you that I haven't. It is precisely because of Christ's actions that God takes sin so seriously. Christ died and rose that you might be free from sin that you might walk in the newness of life. And when we allow sin to grow in our lives unchecked, we are making a mockery of God's gifts to us in Baptism. We show that we really are not allowing God to work his wonderful works in our lives. We are showing that our hands, our internet, our feet, our alcohol, our eyes, and our friends are more important to us than being with Jesus. We would rather have them and hell to follow than rid ourselves of them and live in the eternal life that God gives to us so freely.

All of us at one time or another have not taken sin in our lives as seriously as we should. And for that we must return today to our Lord. We must admit that we have allowed ourselves to be dragged to the edge of the pit of hell because of our sin. But, thankfully once again today our Lord is ready to snatch us from the edge of the pit of hell back into his loving arms. He is just waiting to remove the sin that has separated us from God that we might be just as close to him as possible. Because God was so serious about sin, Jesus died for our sins

and suffered the rejection of the Father in our place. But now because he has done that, we have forgiveness and life. The sin that we have allowed to grow is removed and we are raised with Jesus to new life no longer being bound to sin. Rather than living at the edge of the pit of hell, we are free to walk in this world right smack dab in the center of the kingdom of God. And as God feeds us with his word and with his supper we realize that the things of God are much more blessed than our hands, our feet, and our eyes. If those things are going to take us away from God, we can do without them. Life with God is our heart's desire and it has been given to us in great abundance. Amen.