

Mark 3:20-35

"The Stronger Man"

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 5B)

June 9, 2024

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.

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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Jesus said, ***"No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house"*** (Mark 3:27).

Everywhere Jesus went, crowds gathered. We see this in today's Gospel reading. People just wanted to touch Him. They just wanted to see Him perform miracles. They wanted to hear His powerful preaching. To this, there were certainly questions. Who is Jesus? Is He a rabbi? Is He a prophet? Is He a sorcerer? Could He be the promised Messiah? Could He just be crazy, a misguided lunatic, a charlatan, a fraud? Could He be an agent of Satan?

Even those who were closest to Jesus – *His earthly family* – did not know Him. Certainly, they thought they knew Jesus, but they did not. For they were saying, ***"He is out of His mind"*** (Mark 3:21). His family was saying to Him: *"Enough!"* They wanted to talk some sense into Him, or even restrain Him. They thought it was insane and unhealthy the way He was going about Galilee preaching and teaching. They thought the work had gotten to Him, or He was burned out. So, they came to Capernaum to do an intervention: ***"Jesus, it's time to end this and just come home!"***

By their actions, His own family did not know Him. They did not believe in Him as the promised Messiah. Nor did they understand the necessity of Him using every opportunity in sharing His message.

If His family had serious misgivings about Jesus, the Jewish religious leaders went all out in seeking to undermine His influence. Now, they could not deny that Jesus was performing miracles or driving out demons. But their minds were made up about Him: *"He's evil!"* They cry out: ***"He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out demons"*** (Mark 3:22).

Now, "Beelzebul" was a wordplay on the Philistine false god known as "Baal." Beelzebul had become to be known as "the ruler of demons," or "the master of the spirits."

As they name dropped “Baal”, Jesus gives the true name for “Baal.” For “Baal” was just another disguise or alias for Satan himself.

Jesus replies, ***“How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end”*** (Mark 3:23-26).

In effect, Jesus is saying: *“How is Satan able to cast himself out? Do you not know basic principles? A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. If I am aligned with Satan, My ministry against him is divided. So, he is of no effect and is finished. But that is not true, since Satan is still living and active and is still a powerful force, a force that I am dealing with.”*

You see, the last thing Satan would ever do is cast out his own demons. Satan would never cast out his own henchmen. Satan would never divide against himself.

As much as today’s society would like us to believe that Satan is a figment of our imagination, Jesus says here that Satan is very real. Satan likes working behind the scenes. Satan likes not taking the credit. That’s why he disguises himself as “Baal,” as “Molech,” as an “angel of light.”

Since the Fall of Man, by luring Adam and Eve to commit the original sin: pride. As Proverbs 16:18 says, ***“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”*** Pride is the sin that is celebrated by the fallen world this month. Pride is the worship not of God, but a worship of the self and submission only to self. Pride should not be celebrated. No expression of pride – *the excessive love of self* – should ever be accepted or tolerated and certainly celebrated as pride has become its own false idol, a false idol that Satan used to convince angels to become demons, a false idol that Satan used to convince Adam and Eve to question God’s love for them.

As Adam and Eve bit into the forbidden fruit, Satan took possession of this fallen world and everyone in it. But now Jesus has come to bind up Satan. He has come to plunder Satan’s house. He has come to destroy Satan’s kingdom. Jesus has come to reclaim those who were possessed by Satan. Jesus has come to redeem all those who would trust in Him.

Jesus has come to set you free from your sins. He has come to claim you. He has come to make you His very own.

But what do these Jewish religious leaders see in Jesus? They see Jesus as the incarnation of evil.

The only unforgiveable sin is unbelief. For Jesus says, ***“Truly, I say to you ... whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”*** (Mark 3:28, 29). Jesus is extremely serious here. He isn't mincing His words.

You see, the Holy Spirit's main work is to point us to Jesus, so that He may be known in the Means of Grace: His Word and Sacraments.

As fallen people, we are spiritually blind and dead (Ephesians 2:1), so that we are unable to come to faith in Jesus on our own, let alone choose to entrust our lives to Him. Apart from the Holy Spirit, we actively resist the Gospel's call to faith in Jesus Christ, since ***“the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh”*** (Galatians 5:17).

This unforgiveable sin is the stubborn, persistent refusal to allow the Holy Spirit to do His work. Faith in Jesus is the gift of God. ***“No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit”*** (1 Corinthians 12:3).

People can and often do resist the Holy Spirit's power. They hear the Gospel invitation, but they resist. By their own stubbornness, they close their hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit. And without the Holy Spirit, there can be no repentance; there can be no forgiveness; there can be no faith; and there can be no salvation.

When people resist the Holy Spirit, they remain in their sins, their unbelief, their blasphemy. This was the sin of these Jewish religious leaders. They refused to hear His Gospel promise. They claimed they knew who Jesus was, but they stubbornly resisted what the Holy Spirit wanted to reveal to them. Their hearts and their minds were closed.

Has it ever occurred to you that you may be guilty of an unforgiveable eternal sin? Have you ever doubted Jesus' promises? Have you ever neglected Jesus' words of Law and Gospel? We would like to say, “Not me!”

Do you recall those words said by your Godparents at your Baptism? Do you recall those words you said on your Confirmation Day?

“Do you renounce the devil? Do you renounce all his works? Do you renounce all his ways?” Have you ever given into Satan’s temptations to live according to the fallen world?

You see, Satan is consistently tempting us to **not** *“Know, Grow, and Go”* in God’s Word in avoiding your Sabbath rest in God’s Word and His Sacraments, but instead Satan urges us to follow his ways of sexual immorality, idolatry, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, divisions, and envy (Galatians 5:19-21).

Now, if you are worried that you may have committed an unforgivable eternal sin, let me assure you that you are not guilty of sinning against the Holy Spirit. The fact that you are concerned means that the Holy Spirit is working on you and in you and is still seeking to bring you to repentance and to assure you of salvation in Jesus Christ.

For people who are guilty of this sin, they never even consider it. They don’t even think about it. They go on in their lives in stubborn indifference with their minds closed to the truth. Their hearts resist the Holy Spirit’s gracious invitation.

May we never forget Christ’s Gospel promise: ***“Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter”*** (Mark 3:28). So, if you are troubled by any particular sin, hear Christ’s words again: ***“All sins will be forgiven.”*** Remember, Jesus forgave those who spat in His face, who beat Him, who mocked Him, and who hung Him on the tree of the cross. He forgave and restored His disciples who had forsaken Him and denied Him. And He will even forgive you.

So, is Jesus crazy? Is He misguided? Is He of the devil? No, Jesus is the Strong One who came to bind up Satan. He came to rob Satan’s house by His dying on the cross. He has come to make you His own. He has come to forgive you. And He is here today as He comes to us in His very body and blood under the bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Altar to forgive your sins.

Thanks be to God that Satan’s power over us is broken. Yet, Satan still brings us troubles – *as he is still living and active* – in this fallen world, but he can never do more than Christ allows. Satan cannot hold us. For everyone in Christ, we no longer belong to Satan. We belong to the Stronger Man, who comes to you this day with the promise to forgive all your sins. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen. **+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**