



Pentecost 2-June 6, 2021

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Mark 3:20-35

“Binding the Strongman”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

We are back in the gospel of Mark today after a few weeks hearing from the gospel of John. Once again in today's reading from Mark, we are reminded of the fast pace of his gospel compared to the other gospels. Today's reading comes from only the third of sixteen chapters in Mark's gospel. In the first three two chapters of Mark, John the Baptist says Jesus is coming and Jesus arrives a few verses later. Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus is tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Jesus begins his ministry by healing many people and choosing his 12 disciples. Crowds of people had begun to follow and gather around Jesus wherever he went. But now in chapter three, Jesus returns home. Jesus is not presented with a welcome home parade. If Mark would have used language of today, he may have said, "Well Jesus, you had a good run. Albeit, a short run, but now words are coming from your mouth that sound like something only a crazy person would say, and it is time for you to be silent. You are preaching words of forgiveness to people who have not kept the law. Jesus has begun preaching the difference between justice and mercy and it sounds foolish in the ears of the people who have gathered in his hometown. Jesus' family members were some of the first people to attempt to silence Jesus. And when the scribes accused Jesus of being more than just foolish, but being Satan himself, it appeared that it was time for Jesus to find another line of work like carpentry that won't embarrass his family.

But when Jesus' family went out to try to restrain Jesus, all of their efforts to bring him into the house out of sight of the crowd failed. If it wasn't embarrassing enough for his family, the scribes arrived in town from Jerusalem, and they told his family that their brother was possessed by Satan since they had heard about him casting out demons.

Jesus then starts speaking using parables destroying the case the scribes had made against him. Jesus told them, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" Wouldn't Satan be working for Satan rather than casting demons out of people. If Satan has revolted against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. The scribes and Jesus' family become even more confused when Jesus tells the parable of the binding of the strongman.

You would think that Jesus should be the strongman in the story, not Satan.

When I was in Junior High, it was hard to get anyone to teach our Sunday School class. The two classes that had been put together had not earned a great reputation which did not encourage many to step up to the task of teaching our class. Finally, it seems like a last resort a very elderly couple who had not taught Sunday School for many years thought they would give it a try. We lived up to our reputation and didn't make it easy or fun for them, but I recall the husband of this couple repeating something several times that has always stuck with me. He would say to us, "The Devil is mighty." and then after a long pause would add, "But the Lord is

Almighty.” In the same way in Jesus’ parable, Jesus doesn’t deny the strength or might of the devil, but then Jesus tells how the strength of Satan is taken away.

Jesus starts with what he describes as binding the strongman. Jesus doesn’t enter the house and look around to see if there is anything of the devil that he would want to have. Jesus doesn’t assign Satan to one part of the house while Jesus takes up residence on his side of the house. As Jesus told the scribes that day, “a house that is divided will fall”. Jesus binds up the strongman, the devil by filling the house with only his voice, so that there is no room for the lies and deceitful words from Satan. Satan’s might and strength is eliminated when there is no room for him to speak. And when Satan hears only the voice of Jesus in a house, he is bound up and quickly leaves the house and looks for a house that will let his voice be heard.

We heard of this binding of Satan in the first lesson for today when he attempted to take up residence in Adam and Eve’s house. While God was silent, Satan caused Adam and Eve to question what God had commanded them to do and what not to do. The Lord did not stay silent for long. He went searching for Adam and Eve and told them one of the first parables in scripture. The Lord said, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head and you will strike his heel.” Adam and Eve didn’t understand what the Lord meant at that time. The Lord was making the first promise and prophecy about how one day, this might of the devil will be crushed forever.

Once the strongman is bound, the stronger man, Jesus plunders the house. He doesn’t sort through what is left behind by Satan but removes anything and everything that Satan had any part of. Then after the strongman is bound and the house is plundered, Jesus moves in and speaks to the homeowners who now have Jesus’ undivided attention and says, “Your sins are forgiven”. Jesus delivers mercy instead of applying an appropriate measure of justice.

Jesus doesn’t make a long list of sins and draws a line between those that are forgivable and those that cannot be forgiven. The only unforgivable sin that Jesus identifies is sinning against the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, there are people who stay away from churches because they feel they have committed an unforgivable sin. For some, the strongman is still in the house so they cannot hear the unconditional words of forgiveness. The only eternal sin that Jesus cannot forgive is believing that Jesus cannot forgive their sin. And this is what Satan continues to say, until he is bound, and his house is plundered.

At this year’s synod assembly, we heard one of the most familiar parables. The parable of the Good Samaritan. This parable describes how the one who was stripped, beaten, and abandoned for dead did not find what they needed by those who kept the law. Jesus told this parable to people who wanted to justify themselves by wanting to know who their neighbors are so they could keep the law. Instead, Jesus answers this question not by who your neighbor is, but a neighbor is someone who shows mercy.

Wayne Gallipo, pastor at St. Dysmas the ELCA congregation at the SD prison. He told us what the inmates desire to hear. He said, “These inmates don’t want to hear about justice, they want to hear words of mercy.” I look forward to the day when we can worship in person with our neighbors at St. Dysmas. You really can understand what Jesus meant by binding the strongman and plundering his house when you receive the Lord’s Supper with this congregation. Satan has been removed completely from the house even though it is a prison meant so that justice is served so that Jesus’ words of mercy are the only words that can be heard. Amen