

Year B 2nd after Pentecost (Proper 10) Mark 3:20-35 “No Room For Division”

Jesus has been, for a short time, proclaiming the good news that God’s kingdom is at hand. He has been healing everyone who comes to him. He has been teaching in the synagogues – amazing and astonishing people with his authority. He has even said to a paralytic man, “Your sins are forgiven.” *That* sure upset the religious leaders. He has been casting out demons from their human victims. These demons have recognized and acknowledged his authority, calling him the Son of God. The news of all of this is spreading like wildfire, Mark tells us. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of the curious and the adoring are flocking to see him. And...his family, back in Nazareth, get wind of all this.

You can just imagine what his family might be thinking as bits and pieces of rumours came floating back to them from distant towns: “He thinks he’s healing people?” they say. “He thinks he’s casting out demons?” they scoff. “He thinks he’s the Son of God? We think he’s nuts!”

And so, Jesus arrives home, followed by the crowd clamouring after him like he’s a rock star. He talks in riddles that leave people shaking their heads in confusion, and then – when his family comes to his front door to confront him with an intervention – he looks at the adoring crowd at his feet and declares that they are his mother and brothers and sisters. Yah, okay, he sounds a little bit nuts.

But...we know Jesus is not nuts so let’s make sense of this odd sounding passage together. Jesus’ family is a bit of a concern because they think he’s gone out of his mind but *his* biggest worry is the religious leaders – *they* are the dangerous ones. We hear today that some scribes came from Jerusalem to check him out. Jerusalem, the centre of the Jewish faith, home of the Temple of God, has sent

people to look into this Jesus of Nazareth. The news of his teaching with authority, forgiving people their sins, healing hundreds, and casting out demons has reached the ears of the “powers that be” in the Temple. They haven’t come to be his adoring followers though. They’re checking him out and they don’t like what they see.

Jesus and his followers aren’t behaving like John the Baptist and his followers. Jesus and company are not fasting – they’re eating and drinking...with outcasts and sinners no less. He’s healing on the Sabbath, breaking their Sabbath rules and letting his disciples break their Sabbath rules. He can’t possibly be God’s prophet but thousands are following this disruptive upstart. This needs to stop. The Pharisees and the loyal followers of King Herod are already plotting together to kill Jesus as we heard last week.

“He is only able to cast out demons because he is possessed by a demon!” the scribes yell out, hoping to turn the crowd away from him. “In fact, he’s possessed by the demon of all demons, the Prince of demons – Satan himself,” they tell the crowd. “Really?” Jesus snorts in response. “Why on earth would Satan work against himself by driving out his own demons?”

And here we get to the meat of the message Jesus has for us. Jesus declares that no one can plunder a strong man’s house unless the strong man has first been tied up. Jesus has just been talking about Satan – Satan will fall if he works against himself – but Satan is not the strong man Jesus is talking about here. Jesus himself is the strong man. This is God’s house and Satan will not be able to plunder God’s house unless he ties up God first. It did look for a moment like Satan had managed to do this with Jesus nailed to the cross, bound by the sin of the world.

God's house was ripe for the picking but, Jesus didn't stay bound. We know the rest of the story. Jesus' death and resurrection allows us to be in relationship with God – clothed with the righteousness of Christ. And so, Jesus says today, "Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander that they utter." But...there is a "but." Not everyone will be forgiven – the house is divided.

Not everyone will turn to God and embrace his ways. Even some of those who think they have turned to God don't embrace his ways. "Those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven," Jesus says. And he is saying this to the scribes – the scribes have said he has an unclean spirit, a demon, when actually he has the Holy Spirit. The scribes, Jesus says, are therefore guilty of an unforgivable sin. Sin is the turning away from God. The scribes would have been shocked – they lived their lives for God, studying his laws, teaching others his laws. They had turned their lives to God...or so they thought. They believed they had turned their lives to God but part of them was still turned toward the wrongful ways of the world. They lived and breathed the Law and the Prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures yet they refused to acknowledge the fulfillment of those Scriptures when it was staring them in the face. They were a house divided.

We see division on multiple levels today. A kingdom divided cannot stand, Jesus says. God gave to us his kingdom, gave to us himself as our perfect sovereign and yet, like the Israelites in our first reading, we choose a worldly king. We have damaged his kingdom, we have fought wars in his kingdom, we have created unjust societies in his kingdom. We live in a world full of conflict and division –

from genocide across the ocean to anti-mask rallies in our own backyard. The division touches us.

It touches us in the Church – Christ’s body. Our ears have wandered off, listening to leaders who found unity impossible. Our eyes saw greener pastures elsewhere and have left. Our feet have walked off, disgruntled, and don’t bother attending church anywhere anymore. We are a house divided.

Even within ourselves, we are divided. We strive to keep our lives turned to God but sometimes the lure of the wrongful ways of the world is irresistible. We hand some loose change to the homeless person on the street yet buy ourselves an \$80 bottle of perfume “just because.” We all have a “just because” purchase now and then...perhaps much more than we’d care to admit. We haven’t talked to Harry at the family reunion for years because we had a fight way back and never got over it. We were cranky at work and snapped at a co-worker then never apologized because, well, the moment had passed so why bring it up again? Whatever our story, whatever our moment, we are all divided. “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.”

Jesus doesn’t leave us hanging there though – stranded in our divided house with no hope before us. He looks around at us, his adoring crowd, and he says, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” Whoever does God’s will...What is God’s will? I’ve said this many times and I will say it again – God’s will, his purpose, is – and always has been reconciliation – to bring everyone and everything into perfect relationship with him and with each other...and he does this through Christ. Being in perfect

relationship means loving and being loved – the perfect love of God. Love leaves no room for divisions. But, the sort of love God requires of us is not easy. It is the “lay down your life for another” sort of love; the “let old hurts go” kind of love; a “get over yourself, admit you are wrong” sort of love; a “love the people who are not like you” kind of love, and so much more. As we enter into a time of intense change, many of us will need to be highly vigilant in the struggle to love as God loves – guarding against the strong human desire to keep a personal comfort zone. Striving to achieve this sort of love is well worth the struggle. Jesus promises us we will be his mother, his brothers, and his sisters...God’s children... when we struggle to love like this – to love as he loves us. As God’s children we live in God’s kingdom and God’s kingdom cannot be a divided kingdom...God’s love leaves no room for division. God’s love invites and welcomes. Jesus is not nuts when he calls us his family and he is not rejecting his biological family – he is adding to it.

As is so often the case, Jesus holds up our imperfections and the imperfections of the world while at the same time holding up our hope that we will overcome these imperfections. On the one hand, we are a house divided and a house divided cannot stand. On the other hand, God’s kingdom cannot be a divided kingdom. We are invited to let go of our divisions and enter into that kingdom, inviting others to enter with us, by doing God’s will – loving as Christ loves us. We have the choice – it is always our choice. God’s love leaves no room for division.