

**June 10, 2018**  
**Third Sunday After Pentecost**  
**Mark 3:20-35 (Year B: Lectionary 10)**  
**Lutheran Church of Our Father, Greensboro, NC**

So we've been mostly hanging out in the Gospel of John for the last little while, but we've now switched back to the Gospel of Mark. And we're pretty much gonna stay in Mark from now until August. Which I like, because as I've said before I have no problem admitting that Mark is absolutely my favorite gospel. And part of that is that everything is so fast paced and action packed. We've talked before about how Mark is a whirlwind, where Jesus is like a man of fire running all over the place healing and teaching and bringing God's kingdom. And we see that fast-pace in today's gospel.

It's only 9 sentences long, and yet somehow it contains a parable, a hard-to-process proclamation about an eternal sin, and a redefinition of what family really is. It's a lot jammed into just a couple short paragraphs, far more than can be covered in just one sermon. But that's how Mark's gospel is; jam packed, blink and you'll miss it, whirlwind-esque storytelling.

And for that reason, we're gonna hunker down in the first part of the reading and really just unpack this parable, because I think once we wrap our heads around it, we'll see how it lifts up some of the central themes of this gospel, which will help us as we continue to move through it this summer.

So Jesus has been doing all sorts of miracles, including casting out demons. And the scribes – who we have already read are looking for any way possible to get rid of this Jesus guy – the scribes start claiming that Jesus himself is possessed by a demon. And so Jesus says:

“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 his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.”

Jesus' initial point here is pretty clear. How can Satan cast out Satan? If Satan is rising up against himself, then he's in big trouble, right? If Satan is working against himself, then he's not really much of a threat. I mean it stands to reason that a guy who's going all through the countryside casting out demons isn't doing Satan any favors. And so clearly this isn't what's going on with Jesus. But then he uses this little parable of tying up the strong man to describe what really is going on. And it's really short, but it's really interesting.

Jesus says that nobody can go into a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man. So in this image the house seems to belong to Satan, and it's Jesus who needs to infiltrate and subdue Satan, so that Satan's house can be plundered. And a whole bunch of things are really interesting about this.

The first thing that jumps out to me at least, is that Jesus needs to break into the house, because “the strong man” or Satan is living there. Which initially strikes me as odd. After all, shouldn’t it be God’s house? Didn’t God create the world good? Why is Jesus acting like Satan is the ruler of the house? But when I thought about it, I thought of another story that might help us think through this one:

It’s a story about a lion king... named Mufasa. You know this one, right? Mufasa is the King, and things are good. And then Scar snakes his way into the scene. And Scar takes over, and he’s running things as though he is in charge. But we all know he’s not supposed to be in charge. It is *not* Scar’s kingdom. He’s just placed himself on the throne. And remember, with Scar things are not good. Everything turns kinda grayscale. And it’s all dried up and barren and there are no pastures or herds. And then of course, Simba comes back. Simba, the son of the King, comes and faces Scar and takes back what belongs to the King. And he restores things to how they were meant to be.

This is the exact image that Jesus is giving us today. Of course the house doesn’t belong to Satan. And neither do the possessions. And yet Satan has claimed them for himself. Like Scar, he has claimed dominion over something that does not belong to him. He snakes his way into the story with Adam and Eve and he corrupts humanity and before you know it, he’s stolen it all. And so in that way, Jesus is retelling the story of humanity’s fall. He’s giving us another look at that first reading we had today. This parable is another way of talking about how sin has taken hold of God’s world, of how Satan has claimed ownership of God’s house. And Jesus comes to confront him. To enter the prairie like Simba and defeat the pretender wannabe king. To bind the strong man, and to recapture what he has taken. To redeem what God has created as good.

And that’s perhaps the most interesting thing about this parable to me. Jesus talks of tying up the strong man and plundering his house. It’s not like the house is just empty. When Jesus tells the story, he doesn’t say that he needs to enter the house and just do some tidying or spring cleaning. No, currently the house is invaded. Evil is taking roost in it. And so before Jesus can redeem what Satan has claimed for himself, Jesus first has to evict Satan from his house. This is what bringing God’s Kingdom looks like. For God’s Kingdom to be established on earth as it is in heaven, first the Empires that attempt to control this world must be toppled. In order to bring God’s reign to the earth, he has to first dismantle the reign that earth is already enthralled to.

The house isn’t empty because the world isn’t neutral. It isn’t as though all Jesus needs to do is show up in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine and preach good news and God’s Kingdom will be established. From the second he arrives, he faces opposition. Every time he works to bring healing and wholeness and redemption he is confronted by Satan or demonic forces or scribes and Pharisees who do not want to leave the house. And it’s the same with us today. It isn’t as though all Jesus needs to do is come in and turn the hearts of our world back to him. Because there are other forces that have taken hold. Jesus’ love and redemption isn’t a passive thing. It doesn’t just sit still and wash over us as we bask in it. The redemption that Jesus brings is *active*. It enters, it binds up the forces of evil that defy God, it plunders the house. Jesus *works* to bring

God's Kingdom. His bringing of the Kingdom is actively confronting and combatting the evil that has claimed a stake in the world. The world isn't neutral.

There is a reason why the *-isms* and *-phobias* of this world continue to exist. Why things like racism, sexism, classism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia and on and on continue to exist. And it's because the evil in this world wills them to. If ending it was easy, it would be ended. But it isn't. Because the *-isms* and the *-phobias* have a will. They have a stake in our world. And they've taken to living in the house, and they aren't just going to go away on their own. They *want* to thrive, they will themselves to continue to exist.

The world isn't neutral. The world doesn't just need Jesus to walk in and sit down on the throne. First there are things that need to be evicted. There are things that need to be tied up and overthrown. And Jesus knows turning a blind eye to them isn't going to do it. Waiting for them to leave for vacation so he can sneak in and take things back isn't going to happen. The strong man has to be confronted. He has to be subdued.

The systems of oppression that will themselves to take hold of our world aren't just going to decide to go away. The redemption that Jesus brings is not a passive thing. Redemption doesn't look like Jesus walking into an empty house and filling it up with holiness and Godliness. The house is already full. Satan has already taken roost in it. And so redemption looks like eviction. Redemption starts with exorcism. It starts with subduing the forces of evil that want to control us, so that there's room for God's love to fill us.

And so in a lot of ways, this parable is Jesus' mission statement. Jesus' mission is to tie up the strong man and reclaim what has been stolen. Jesus' mission is to confront the evils that try to assert themselves. To call them out, to face them head on. To evict them, and replace them with godly wholeness and healing and restoration.

And if this is Jesus' mission, it is our mission, because the church's mission is Jesus' mission. And so we are called to be people who tie up the strong man. Which means confronting the forces that illegitimacy claim power in our world. It means not turning a blind eye to systems of evil and oppression, but naming them and calling them out and working to restrain them. It means reclaiming what evil has corrupted, and working to restore it to its full goodness and godliness. If we count ourselves among those of whom Jesus says "here are my mother and brothers" then we are people who have set ourselves on the same collision course with evil powers as Jesus.

Which is a lot. And it is work that we can expect will elicit hostile responses. Just like it did for Jesus. Because the powers and principalities of this world aren't gonna just roll over. And yet, when we confront them, when we name them and set ourselves against them, and tie them up, we do so in the name of Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us for precisely the work such as this. Thanks be to God. Amen.