

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Second Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

66th Week of Pandemic - Second Indoor Service

Genesis 3:8-15

Psalm 130

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Mark 3:20-35

06/06/2021

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

[Jesus went home;] 20and the crowd came together again, so that [Jesus and the disciples] could not even eat. 21When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” 22And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” 23And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 24If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27But 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. 28“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”—30for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.” 31Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your

mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” 33And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 35Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”
The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Family

Good morning! Well... I think I agree with Norm Otto. I'm not sure what they were thinking when they picked some of the texts for the Revised Common Lectionary, the three year cycle that dictates what we read every Sunday. This is certainly one of the more confusing ones. Or, at least it is for me when I read it for the first time. Hopefully, we can unpack all this together. So let's dive right in.

The first thing to know is that the story is following a particular pattern that the writer of the Gospel of Mark likes to use. In Mark we will see one story sandwiching another story. So today we see the arrival of Jesus' family split by the accusation of the scribes from Jerusalem. The family arrives, there is a little dialogue, and then the scribes show up to accuse Jesus of working for Satan, Jesus handles that, and then we return to the issue of Jesus' family. So, if you're anything like me, understanding the structure can help us make sense of the larger whole.

Another thing to understand is the context of the story within the Gospel as a whole. And it's here that you have to love the writer of the Gospel of Mark. From the first words we're off like the Kentucky Derby! In just three chapters A LOT has happened! We've seen Jesus call the

disciples, heal people all over Galilee, and most recently pick the twelve apostles. He has been teaching everywhere he heals too. All of this in just a few chapters! All of this activity has caused some attention from his family and the leaders down in Jerusalem. Remember, Jesus was around 30 years old when he began his ministry, and we have no reason to believe that he had any formal training. So it would be like your cousin Jeff just suddenly going out performing brain surgery and giving TED Talks on the current social problems. “Jeff?” you say, “wasn’t he in construction?” So naturally his family wants to see what’s going on. To put it mildly, they’re worried. Lamar Williamson Jr. is a little more honest, writing: *“They think he is insane. The verb used with Jesus (v. 21) means literally ‘to stand outside of,’ an image reflected by the idiom ‘to be beside oneself’ or ‘to be eccentric’ but rightly rendered by ‘he is out of his mind’ or ‘he’s gone mad!’”*¹ (On a side note, it is interesting to see confirmation that Jesus had brothers and sisters.)

So, there Jesus is trapped in a house with the crowd so large around it that they can’t even get a meal. Then his family shows up and it’s obvious they think that he’s gone crazy. And before that could be settled the first century version of the FBI shows up to ask him a few questions. The scribes accuse him of being in league with Satan, or using spirits to do the miracles that he has accomplished. This was a pretty serious accusation. One scholar writes that *“they provide a formal, legal charge against Jesus: That he exercises satanic powers. Since persons charged with doing magic could*

¹ Williamson, Lamar Jr. *Mark: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2009. p. 84.

be either banished or executed, such suspicions could not be left unchecked.”²

Jesus, being well... Jesus, sets them straight. *“24If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come.”* He teaches them using some short parables. *“The word ‘parable’ refers to various forms of metaphoric speech, from riddles and proverbs to short narratives that illustrate a point of teaching.”³*

And it’s our next part where I always get so confused about what Jesus is telling me. It’s strange to read vs. 28-29 after the hope and grace of our earlier readings, especially the Psalm. *28“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”* But this isn’t about our sins against the Holy Spirit that we need to confess. No, what Jesus is saying here is that when the scribes accuse Jesus of using satanic powers when he is using the Holy Spirit, it becomes something unredeemable. Or, as someone more intelligent than I am puts it: *“Here the point is that the spirit at work in Jesus Christ, by which he casts out demons, is the Holy Spirit of God. To confuse the Holy Spirit with an unclean or demonic spirit, reversing good and evil and attributing the saving acts of God to the destructive power of Satan, is to place oneself outside the realm of God’s forgiveness.”⁴*

² Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Volume 7. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p. 425.

³ Ibid. p. 426.

⁴ Williamson, Lamar Jr. *Mark: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2009. pp. 84-85.

With that handled, we see the return of the original issue, Jesus' family has shown up and they're convinced he's gone crazy. Jesus, never one to let the pot go unstirred, throws out this fantastic reply: *"Here are my mother and my brothers! 35Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."* Again, Lamar Williamson Jr. hits it out of the park when he writes that *"This principle, so difficult [to]... understand, was important for the early church to remember as the basis for its Gentile mission. It came to the earliest church, and it still comes to the community of faith today, as a marching order, an invitation, and a promise. Whoever will hear and do this word may become the true relative of Jesus."*⁵ I love that emphasis on doing that Williamson points out! It's not enough to just listen and hear about the crazy things that God is up to in Jesus Christ! We have to DO something about it too! We cannot allow ourselves to be lulled into complacency, or convinced that someone else will handle it. I'm very fortunate that St. Paul's isn't like this, but it's like the congregations that think it's up to the pastor alone to go do "ministry" while they just show up for church. No! We all have something to do! So St. Paul's.... The winds of Pentecost are still blowing... Where are they taking us? Amen.

⁵ Ibid. p. 85.