

Pastor Joe Polzin
Mark 3:20-35
“Binding and Bruising the Evil One”
Year B – Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 10, 2018

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

We're in the first few weeks of the second half of the church year, the long green Pentecost season with its focus on the life of the church. The first half of the year we focus on the life of Jesus - His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension in the seasons of Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter. Now we focus on the life of the church in the world *after* the ascension of Jesus and after Pentecost. The Holy Spirit going out into the all the world through the preaching of the Word and the giving of the Sacraments.

And with that as our focus, the Gospel that we heard today is a good place to start—where we find Jesus, beginning to preach, heal diseases, and cast out demons. And though the *crowds* couldn't get enough of him, many chose to oppose and speak against him. As you heard, his own family thought he was out of his mind, and some Jewish leaders even accused him of being demon-possessed. The things he said were so contrary to what they thought was acceptable, and so the good he did, well, that must be evil too. Though God was demonstrating his love through his only-begotten Son, the world thought Jesus wrong and crazy at best, or dangerous at worst.

Now as I said, I think that's a good place to start this half of the church year because that's the direction our world seems, in many ways, to be going right now. People and churches that hold to traditional, orthodox Christian doctrine are more and more being considered wrong and behind the times at best, or dangerous at worst.

It was just this past week that the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the baker from Colorado, who refused to allow the state to coerce him in using his freedom of expression to support a form of marriage that God's Word does not endorse. And our Synod wrote in support of the religious liberties of that man, that no person should be forced to express views that contradict their conscience or religious beliefs. So, now, how is our Synod viewed by others? I heard from at least one person directly that *we're* wrong and behind the times, and they consider us dangerous to this current world. All for believing and speaking what God's Word says.

Yet, this is nothing new. Though history changes and the church has been more acceptable at certain times in history, there have been times like this too - when the world thinks the church so dangerous that it must be eliminated. The first few centuries after Jesus saw the church under intense persecution. That changed when the emperor Constantine made Christianity the religion of the empire, which protected and advanced it.

But then there was the rise of Islam and threat it posed. Yet, Christianity flourished again in the time of the reformation. However, it was also during this time that new attacks began to form. From rationalism, to scientism, communism, to secularism, all the way to today's outright humanism. All are belief systems that are threatened by, and therefore respond in aggression towards, Christianity.

But no matter what the tide of history, in times good for the church or bad, from the time of Adam and Eve to the time still to come, this has been a constant: *that Satan is at work*. Sometimes subtle, sometimes obvious. When times are good, tempting us to be

complacent and satisfied. When times are bad, tempting us to hide and be silent in fear. When times are easy, luring us into getting fat and lazy. When times are tough, discouraging us into hunkering down and separating ourselves from the world.

And it's not just the world and its history - I'll bet most of you can identify all of those times *in your own lives*. Times when you've grown complacent with your faith and satisfied with your knowledge of God's Word. Times when you wouldn't speak about Jesus or the truth because you were afraid of what others would think if they knew you were one of "them." Times when, fat and lazy, the Bible didn't get opened for a while, your prayers faltered, and going to church was just you going through the motions. And times when you thought: *To hell with the world*, literally, and so you decide to fight evil with evil instead of with love and forgiveness. Perhaps you're in one of those times right now.

Satan *is* at work, in good times and in bad, in the world and in each of us, trying to weaken and destroy our faith and snatch us from our Father in heaven.

So how good to hear... these words from Jesus today, in response to those who oppose him. That he is not demon-possessed nor fighting evil with evil. And despite what they may have thought, he is not fighting against the people who accused him, either. In fact, He has come to save those who are afflicted by this strong man, by binding Satan and plundering his house.

"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). And so what happened at the time of Jesus, what was truly so incredible and revolutionary, was that God entered the strong man's house in the person of Jesus, to bind Satan and plunder him.

Now you may be thinking: it sure doesn't look like Jesus bound Satan. Just look at all the evil and false teaching and godlessness in our world today. Satan sure doesn't seem bound, and Jesus sure doesn't seem very victorious. But perhaps we need to reconsider what the battle is actually all about. Where the battleground is, and what the stakes truly are.

Consider what we heard from the apostle Paul today: "We do not lose heart." Even in a world that seems intent on marching toward evil. Why? Because "though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

Now that's quite the opposite of how many tend to think, thinking that it's what I can see and feel that's real, that's the lasting thing, and what I cannot see, the spiritual, is uncertain and transient. But the truth is just the opposite. And so, though Satan may be battling for possession of this world, the real battle that's he's fighting is for *you*. It's *you* he wants—your heart, your mind, your soul. If he can use the things of this world, great. But ultimately it's not the world he wants, it's you. And so, what we see in the world are the symptoms of the larger problem—the corruption and enslavement of hearts and minds that he has been able to accomplish.

And so it is precisely *within you*, within hearts and minds of his people, that Jesus has come to bind the strong man and plunder him. To free hearts and minds enamored with sin and captivated by evil, and turn them to himself in repentance and faith. And that's why the weapon Jesus used looked so senseless and stupid to the world: How can a captive on a cross set anyone free? How can death give life? How can one man's shame bring about honor for eternity?

From the transient perspective of a sinful world that can't see beyond the end of its nose, Jesus *is* out of His mind. But when it comes to the unseen, yet eternal things of God, including

the battleground of your heart and mind, the word of the cross is the power of God to set people free.

It is the *forgiveness of sins* that binds Satan and strips him of his power. It is the truth that sets our minds on the things that are eternal. For on the cross, Satan looked powerful, but by the resurrection, he is exposed. God's love and life is more powerful than sin and death. And so for those bound in sin and death, which includes you and me, Jesus' resurrection binds the one who has bound us, and sets us free.

And so, today, that binding and freedom is now accomplished where His cross and resurrection is for us now: in the preaching of the Word and the giving of the Sacraments. Those weapons look senseless and stupid in worldly terms, too. Water, words, bread, and wine don't look like weapons.

But they are, when the Holy Spirit is in them, making them the very means through which Satan is still bound today. For through them the Holy Spirit is working, cleansing hearts, freeing minds, and feeding souls. Neglect these, and you despise the Spirit who works through them and delivers his forgiveness. Neglect these, and you let Satan loose in your heart and mind and face a dangerous eternal reality. But remain in these, and Satan can't help but be muzzled, bound, weakened, and plundered. Your heart and mind claimed by the Spirit for Christ, for life and for eternity.

By the way, this eternity is not just some far distant, dreamy, future that we'll get to enjoy *someday*. No, it's an eternity that has begun already now. A new reality, a new family, a new life that Jesus has provided for you beginning now. For Jesus "looking about at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother'" (Mark 3:34-35). And will of God is that we remain in the gifts and the faith that He has provided for us. That is how Jesus looks at you, and how we can now look at each other. That doesn't diminish our earthly relationships that we have, but only adds to them.

And it doesn't mean that we won't have any problems. As you know, families have plenty of problems and often fight and disagree. Churches can too. But, rather, this means that there's something else that defines us now. Not just the family we're physically born into, but also the family we're spiritually born into, through water and the Word. The family we have Sunday supper with. The family we sorrow with, rejoice with, and live with in forgiveness and faith.

And as we do, we find something surprising: that Jesus continues plundering Satan's house, and continues bruising the serpent's head. Jesus is the offspring of the woman spoken of to Eve in Genesis, who would bruise the serpent's head, bruise Satan eternally, by what he accomplished on the cross. But it wasn't simply a one-time deal. Jesus continues to do so, even today.

Every time a person is baptized into this family, every time you hear the Word of God and keep it, every time you repent and receive forgiveness, every time you give forgiveness instead of holding a grudge, every time you pray, every time you do good works instead of lashing out, every time you speak the truth, every time you help and love and live as the child of God you are . . . you know why Satan is so mad?

Because it's *his* head continuing to be crushed! It's like a multitude of little Christ's heels coming down again and again. A constant drumbeat, a constant bruising. The victory over Satan that Jesus won on the cross continues on through the Spirit in those who belong to Christ.

Which puts a little different spin on things, on your life and what you do, doesn't it? It even makes it kinds of fun to be a Christian! And if Satan flips out and goes crazy against us because of it (which we really should expect anyway)? And if the whole world turns against us and against the church? It will be hard, but we should have no worries. "For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1).

That's the confidence we have in Jesus, through his Spirit given to us, making us children of the Father. Satan may have designed our Fall, but Jesus has accomplished our salvation. And He is greater. The strong man is bound by the stronger man, and you belong to Him. In Jesus' name.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

(This sermon is adapted from Rev. James Douthwaite, St. Athanasius Lutheran Church, Vienna, VA, June 7, 2015.)