

Plundered, to be Family into the Aeons

Mark 3:20-35

Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 10, 2018

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

Our text, “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.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As the saying goes, “There’s nothing new under the sun.” Our world today thinks Jesus crazy because He works to cast out darkness – he calls sin sin, darkness darkness, and the world that revels in such things despises his truth – calls *it* darkness! The world in his day also thought Jesus crazy – why? – because he worked to cast out darkness! The Scribes were convinced that he cast out demons by the prince of demons. His own family thought him out of his mind because of his teachings and his claims. Nothing new under the sun!

And yet, as they raise such a raucous, his family, the scribes, and our world show themselves to be the ones in need of help. Consider the argument of the scribes – “By the prince of demons, he casts out demons.” And Jesus gently shows the absurdity of the claim: “How can Satan cast out Satan?”

Yes, it’s not Jesus who needs help from insanity, it’s the scribes and the world they represent, the sinners who are Jesus’

family, the sinners who we are as children of the Fall. Isn't that Fall of Adam and Eve actually a perfect teaching lesson of "a house divided against itself"? In their godly perfection, Adam and his wife knew what was good for them. And yet, in open revolt against their own godly perfection, their house crumbled. Adam divided against his own self and the perfection in which God made him could not stand. Such is the only possible result of following temptation.

Why, when we are tempted, do we believe that – just maybe this once – a godly conscience divided against itself can still stand? Why do we say, "Yes, just this once, holiness asked to attack itself will remain holy and undefiled"? Isn't that the same 'brilliant' logic that the scribes used?... they used it to suggest the absurd: that Jesus attacking Satan is Satan attacking himself. We use it to suggest the absurd: that temptation attacking the holy is actually holy and ought be followed. Yes, rather than repent of and resist our sins we try to explain them away and clear our conscience, and the only way we can do so is to claim that a house divided against itself can still stand... that I – divided against all that God has created and commanded and promised and planned for me in His Word– I can nevertheless still stand. It's absurd.

When we flail about in the absurd and show the futility of our sinfulness, we put on display that Old Adam who once – without any competition and wrestling from a New Adam not yet born of God – that Old Adam had once been slave and captive to the powers

of the devil. In the Fall, the devil had convinced mankind to try and be divided against his God-given holiness and still stand. And, into that trap man had fallen so completely that we were in utter bondage to the devil... mere tools and trophies and goods in the house of Satan.

And once we had succumbed to such slavery and bondage, oh no! – who could be stronger than the strong man to set us free? Jesus says, “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.”

This is the gospel of our text, isn’t it? This is Jesus’ description of that gospel first reported to the serpent in earshot of Adam and Eve: “[The Christ] shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” In doing what the world considered absurd and crazy, in becoming man and giving himself up on the tree of the cross, Christ broke down the gates of death, entered the strong man’s house, and led captivity captive. The book of Hebrews says it this way:

He himself likewise partook of the same (flesh and blood), that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Heb. 2:14)

Isn’t this what John the Baptist promised when he said, “One will come after me who is *stronger*...” indeed One strong enough to burst into the devil’s domain – to descend into hell not in condemnation

but in victory – and to bind the strong man. The image of Revelation seems to describe this when it says that “Worthy is Christ the Lamb who was slain” to open the book of life; only He is worthy because only He defeated sin, death, and the power of the devil... with the result that, Revelation says, an angel (a servant of ‘Christ the stronger than the strong’) descended from heaven holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon... who is Satan, and bound him ... and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him.”

Jesus says in our text, “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.”

And that’s exactly what Christ has done. He has plundered the house of Satan and rescued you and brought you out of the kingdom of darkness into His kingdom of light: “Depart you unclean spirit and make room for the Holy Spirit”... child, though you were once a child of darkness you are now a child of God’s light. That’s the promise of your baptism, isn’t it? Though we still wrestle with the Old Adam, there’s no reason to fear condemnation and accusation by Satan. He has been hog-tied and you’ve been plundered into the kingdom of the Son to share with him in all things.

Thus, why would we now live in ways that threaten to divide this kingdom of the Son against itself. In the joy of our salvation, don’t we with Luther confess that “Christ has saved me, rescued me

from the devil... that I may be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as he lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true”?

And yet, though that sounds *so great*, we see our daily lives and they’re full of sin. How much we would love to serve him in the joy of our salvation, and yet how much we must pray that he restore to us the joy of our salvation because our Old Adam robs us of it with such ease. Jesus himself comments on this, “The spirit is willing, the flesh is weak.” The flesh is weak because it is born of flesh – not flesh as in skin and bone, but flesh as in Old Adam. The spirit is willing because it is born of Spirit – not spirit as in mind and heart, but Spirit as in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and giver of life, who puts you in and keeps you in the kingdom of the Son and sustains you from dividing that kingdom from itself. Again, isn’t this what the baptismal rite says: “Depart you unclean spirit and make room for the Holy Spirit”?

That’s why Jesus now transitions in our text to no longer talk about plundering Satan, but now about the sin against the Holy Spirit. All other sin can be dealt with specifically because the Spirit helps us in our weakness: Paul says,

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through groans too deep for words. And he who searches our

hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people *in accordance with the will of God.*"

Notice that: the Holy Spirit keeps God's people *in accordance with the will of God*, not in the sense that we will always perfectly act on it, but because our hope is in Christ and not in our supposed freedom to divide the kingdom or the house. The body divided from the head is dead; the Christian divided from Christ is dead. The Spirit works tirelessly to keep us in accordance with God's will – or, as the Catechism says – “to keep us with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

But, how can we live in the Spirit if we blaspheme the Spirit? Jesus uses the “Satan versus Satan” argument, doesn't he? How can one remain in the spirit if he rejects the work of the Spirit? The Spirit who works through Word and Sacrament to keep us with Jesus in the one true faith. Jesus says, “Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit *never* has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.” And, to reinforce it a little, that word for “never” doesn't simply mean “nah, it's not very likely to happen.” Literally, it means “not into the aeons.”

Now, this is frightening to folks – as it should be, Jesus isn't joking – and they wonder, “Have I blasphemed the Holy Spirit?” But, as we said last week, why are you here in church if not to receive the gifts of God? To blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to accuse him of not working as Christ has promised Him to work? Is this not the house

wherein the Holy Spirit works through Word and Sacrament? The one who comes to this place will not find it divided against Christ's own promises but may *rest* in the promise that the Holy Spirit is at work in Word and Sacrament, pointing you to Jesus your righteous substitute – “for you, for the forgiveness of sins”! – keeping you in the faith that “I have Christ, and who can separate me from the love of Christ? Who can bring any charge against me?... I am more than a conqueror... not because I myself am a strong man, but because I have been rescued by One stronger than the strong man, and through His promised gift of the Holy Spirit at work in the precious means of grace... nothing in all creation can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus my Lord.” *His* grace is sufficient for me, so that even when I am weak, I am strong.

Yes, the world will think you out of your mind, crazy, absurd for such certain confidence. Jesus' own mother and brothers did. The scribes did. But, Jesus reminds us at the end of our text that the family of God will not be divided against itself. Those who love the will of God, those who rejoice in the will of God, those who seek and desire (though imperfectly) to do the will of God and bear fruit in the kingdom of God, those are his family.

One commentator says it well when he reminds the reader that for most families, blood is thicker than water; but, for Jesus “water – the water of Holy Baptism – is thicker than blood” (Voelz, 269). Jesus ate the Passover not with his mother and brothers, but

with his disciples – for *they* were his family. When he died on the cross, he entrusted Mary not to his own flesh and blood, but to the house of faith, saying not “mother” but “woman, behold your son...” and to the disciple, “Your mother.” And, when Jesus rose from the grave, he told the women to go *not* to his brothers “but to his disciples and Peter” and, in John’s recording, even said of those disciples, “Go tell *my brothers* that I am ascending to the Father.”

How do you view one another as you sit in the pews near each other? – as those who happen to come to this same building for their same individualistic blessings and comforts each week? Or has Jesus made this place a household of faith where water is thicker than blood and the children of God are gifted with the Holy Spirit by whom we cry “Abba, Father” and live in the safety of those who have been plundered from the kingdom of darkness and adopted into the kingdom of light, a kingdom of that will never be divided against itself but will stand into the aeons.

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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