

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd

Scott Trevithick

Date: June 6, 2021, Year B Second Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Mark 3:20-35

Title: Jesus Getting in Good Trouble

Focus: While there were large crowds that followed Jesus, others were unsettled by his ministry. Jesus was focused on his mission & purpose—doing God’s will as he understood it. He would not be dissuaded or distracted from it, even by his family or by

Gospel Reading: Mark 3:20-35

[Jesus went home;] ²⁰and the crowd came together again, so that they 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.”

A Childhood Message: Don’t Get into Trouble

Have you heard someone say something like this before?

- “You be a good boy,” or “You be a good girl and don’t get into any trouble.”

If that were a *Jeopardy* clue, you would buzz in and say, “What are things that parents say.”

As we were growing up, we probably all heard some version of that message delivered by a parent or grandparent. Maybe we heard it before we went off to school for the day. Maybe we heard that message before we went over to a friend’s house to play or spend the night, something like, “Say ‘Please’ and ‘Thank you’ and be sure to do

as your friend’s parents say.” If you were a bit older, that safety message might be, “Don’t get into any trouble and remember that nothing good happens after midnight.”

John was born in 1940 and grew up in rural Alabama. His parents were farmers. They were sharecroppers—they rented the land by giving a portion of their crops to the landowner at the end of the season. John said as a little boy he was in constant fear because of signs that said, “no colored boys, no colored girls.” His parents and grandparents used to tell him “Don’t get in trouble.”¹

“Don’t get in trouble.” Messages like that delivered by trusted parents and grandparents are the kinds of things that shape your character. Once imbedded in you, it’s hard to veer from that deeply ingrained message. It becomes more of a character trait.

This John was future civil rights leader and Georgia Congressman John Lewis. He learned from his parents and grandparents not to get in trouble, but he also learned a different value about trouble that became his principle for the way he sought to live his life.

In December of 2019, congressman Lewis spoke at the opening of a special exhibit of the Library of Congress called, “Rosa Parks: In Her Own Words.” He recalled the lesson he learned from Rosa Parks, who was a catalyst in the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott:

- “Rosa Parks inspired us to get in trouble. And I’ve been getting in trouble ever since.” “She inspired us to find a way, to get in the way. . .”²
- “[She inspired us] to get in trouble. Good trouble, necessary trouble. When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have to do something; you have to act.”³

And so, John Lewis got into trouble: He said he was arrested or jailed 40 times throughout the 1960s.⁴ He got into trouble not to *cause* trouble, but as a means of living out the philosophy and discipline of nonviolent resistance he learned from Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King. As he said, “you have to do something; you have to act.”

¹ Summarized from article by Carla d. Hayden, “Remembering John Lewis: The Power of Good Trouble,” July 19, 2020. Posted at the Library of Congress blog. <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2020/07/remembering-john-lewis-the-power-of-good-trouble/>

² Hayden Library of Congress article.

³ “Why John Lewis spent his 21st birthday in jail.” <https://www.cnn.com/videos/us/2020/02/20/john-lewis-civil-rights-movement.cnn>

⁴ Jennifer Haberkorn, “John Lewis, civil rights icon and longtime congressman, dies” LA Times. July 17, 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-07-17/rep-john-lewis-civil-rights-icon-dies>

Reactions to Jesus

In our gospel reading, we're only in the third chapter of Mark—fairly early, but we're already deep into the story of Jesus' ministry:

- John has appeared out of the wilderness and baptized Jesus (Mark 1:4-11)
- Jesus has faced temptation in the wilderness (1:12-13)
- And then Jesus came to Galilee and proclaimed that the reign of God or the kingdom of God has come near. He urged people to 'believe the good news' (Mark 1:14-15).
- He has called the disciples (1:14-20)
- And he attracted large crowds of people because of his teaching and healing (1:21-f). There are other little snippets of information that indicate the size and urgency of the crowds which followed Jesus:
 - "the whole city gathered at the door" (1:33),
 - "everyone is searching for you" (1:37),
 - "people came to him from every quarter" (1:45).
 - "so many people gathered around that there was no longer room for them." (2:2)

We're only in the third chapter of Mark, but already Jesus has been active in his public ministry and has provoked some strong reactions. The crowd was attracted to him and wanted—maybe demanded--something more from him—they were always pressing in on him.

Jesus is stressing people out here in the third chapter of Mark. He's worrying them. He's getting into some trouble. What kind of trouble is it and who is getting upset?

Earlier in Mark, before today's designated reading, Jesus had disputes with religious authorities about how to best keep the Sabbath:

- Whether, for instance, it was okay to pluck grain or not (2:23-28) or
- Heal a man with a withered hand (3:1-6)

After Jesus healed the man with the withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath, "The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him" (Mark 3:6)

Jesus was breaking the rules. He wasn't heeding their authority. They didn't like it. He was getting into trouble.

The Scribes

In today's passage, **Jesus is getting into trouble with the "scribes."** The scribes were theological heavyweights. They had the task of interpreting Mosaic Law. They represent the authority and theological wisdom of the temple establishment. They had education and expertise. They see power in Jesus, and they are scared and threatened because that power hasn't been authorized by them. So, they respond to Jesus by trying to discredit him by saying that the things that he is doing are from the devil. They claim that he is a satanic agent and not a divine one. (Mark 3:22). This the

very definition of what it means to “demonize” another person—they align Jesus with Beelzebul, which is to say the Devil.

Jesus’ Family

Perhaps even more striking and startling is **the reaction of Jesus’ own family** to him. Maybe Jesus isn’t getting “in trouble” with them, but you could at least say that they’re worried about him.

Maybe it’s that they’re trying to protect him. Maybe they think he has lost his bearings ever since he trekked out to the wilderness to hear John the Baptizer teach about repentance and then spent forty days on his own wilderness retreat. They might have said things like

- *Now he’s gone too far and has made powerful enemies.*
- *He’s got to rein in the starry-eyed idealism, the pointed rhetoric, and the deviant behavior.*
- *What’s he doing promising people freedom from the power of evil?*
- *He should know what happens to prophetic leaders with large followings in this corner of the Roman world.*

As family to Jesus, they are the ones who would seem to have the most to lose if his ministry provokes the people who possess the power to end it. And so, perhaps in worry, Jesus’ family is taking sort of a protective stance over him. His family says that he has gone out of his mind (Mark 3:21). They are saying something like, “He should know better; we don’t want him to get in any trouble with the authorities.”

There’s that word *trouble* again. Jesus would say that’s “good trouble, necessary trouble.”

Jesus is not Dissuaded

I wonder what our inclinations are about how we see Jesus and how we want him to behave. Do we want to domesticate or tame him, too? Do we also want him to stay out of trouble? Are there times when we want to control and define Jesus like his family and like the scribes as religious authorities?

Jesus says that those who do the will of God are family.

- ³⁵“Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Back in chapter one of Mark, after Jesus was baptized by John and then was in the wilderness, he returned to Galilee and declared his purpose:

¹⁴[Now after John was arrested,] Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Doing the will of God and proclaiming the good news that the reign of God has come near in the coming of Jesus form the “mission statement” or the principles that drive him. God’s intent is healing and forgiveness, mending the wounded, binding up the brokenhearted and lifting the lowly. When Jesus is focused on those things, he’s not worried about getting into trouble. He will not be dissuaded by attempts to discredit him or demonize him or by those who protectively worry about him and say he’s out of his mind.

When John Lewis said, “When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have to do something; you have to act,” he was following in the way of Jesus.

When the scribes accuse Jesus of aligning with Beelzebul, Jesus responds with a short parable about a home invasion. He basically says that he, Jesus, is the one who is able to bring about the reign of God by “tying up the strong man” and taking on the powers of this world.

As we continue reading in Mark over the coming weeks, let us keep our eyes and ears open for how Jesus is proclaiming the reign of God and inviting us to follow. Let us not be afraid to join him in getting into “some good trouble, some necessary trouble.”