

Sunday Lesson – June 6, 2021

GOSPEL: Mark 3: 20 - 35

Just Who is Stronger than Satan?

Background

“So now Jesus comes home. We want to see how this story will play out in his hometown. Up to this point, even with all the excitement, the reports and the prospects have not been good. Even as Jesus continues to heal and to draw crowds and disciple followers, he has to skirt around in the border regions and escape to the mountains (3.1-19). The upshot has been that already only this far in the story the Pharisees and the Herodians conspire how they can destroy him (Mark 3:7). It is telling that the last named disciple Jesus calls is Judas Iscariot, “the one who betrayed him” — the past tense would seem to mark this already as essentially a done deal (Mark 3:19). So when at the beginning of today’s reading we join the crowds, packed together so tightly that they can’t even get their arms free to grab some food, we sense that somebody has to do something to restore some order.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revision-common-lectionary/ordinary-10-2/commentary-on-mark-320-35-2)*

Insight

“*Beelzebub* is the Greek form of the name *Baal-zebub*, a pagan Philistine god worshiped in the ancient Philistine city of Ekron during the Old Testament times. It is a term signifying “the lord of flies” (2 Kings 1:2). After the time of the Philistines, the Jews changed the name to “Beelzeboul,” as used in the Greek New Testament, meaning “lord of dung.” This name referenced the god of the fly that was worshiped to obtain deliverance from the injuries of that insect. Some biblical scholars believe Beelzebub was also known as the “god of filth,” which later became a name of bitter scorn in the mouth of the Pharisees. As a result,



Beelzebub was a particularly contemptible deity, and his name was used by the Jews as an epithet for Satan.” *(Excerpts from gotquestions.org/who-Beelzebub.html)*

Gospel Reading

“Jesus came home and, as usual, a crowd gathered—so many making demands on him that there wasn’t even time to eat. His friends heard what was going on and went to rescue him, by force if necessary. They suspected he was believing his own press. The religion scholars from Jerusalem came down spreading rumors that he was working black magic, using devil tricks to impress them with spiritual power. Jesus confronted their slander with a story: “Does it make sense to send a devil to catch a devil, to use Satan to get rid of Satan? A constantly squabbling family disintegrates. If Satan were fighting Satan, there soon wouldn’t be any Satan left. Do you think it’s possible in broad daylight to enter the house of an awake, able-bodied man, and walk off with his possessions unless you tie him up first? Tie him up, though, and you can clean him out. “Listen to this carefully. I’m warning you. There’s nothing done or said that can’t be forgiven. But if you persist in your slanders against God’s Holy Spirit, you are repudiating the very One who forgives, sawing off the branch on which you’re sitting, severing by your own perversity all connection with the One who forgives.” He gave this warning because they were accusing him of being in league with Evil. Just then his mother and brothers showed up. Standing outside, they relayed a message that they wanted a word with him. He was surrounded by the crowd when he was given the message, “Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside looking for you.” Jesus responded, “Who do you think are my mother and brothers?” Looking around, taking in everyone seated around him, he said, “Right here, right in front of you—my mother and my brothers. Obedience is thicker than blood. The person who obeys God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” The Message

What It Could Mean?

“Close readers of Mark 3:20-35 can’t help but notice that Jesus’ apocalyptic teaching about binding Beelzebul is flanked by stories about Jesus’ own family on either side. Jesus’ family, portrayed in verses 20-21 and 31-32, is demonstrably worried that Jesus is out of his mind. Perhaps they are concerned that Jesus’ Galilean ministry of healing, exorcisms, and controversial teaching looks nothing like nice, traditional familial values. Jesus’ apocalyptic teachings and actions just don’t fit the traditional family.

Then all of this gets complicated by the interests of religious authorities in verse 22. The scribes who show up to intervene “come down” from Jerusalem. They also come down on Jesus by diagnosing his unusual Galilean ministry as demonic behavior. The text describes the scribes’ action as an exercise of power from the religious and cultural center. The point in Mark 3:22 is that the power center is unsettled by Jesus’ ministry and explains his actions as Beelzebul’s influence.

At the center of this pericope in verses 23-30 is Jesus’ clever apocalyptic parable about Satan and who really is being detained. Religious order and familial concerns are on the edges of the text, but smack dab in the middle of verses 23-20 is a Satanic power struggle.

Jesus begins by summing up the scribes’ argument about Beelzebul with his own question: “How can Satan cast out Satan?” Jesus’ clever statement about the mythological Satan actually reframes the family and the scribes’ narrative about Jesus. “No one can enter a strong man’s house,” Jesus says, “and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered” (verse 27). Comparing Satan to a strong man makes sense since evil does seem pretty intractable. What is more, with Satan all tied up, it might be possible for somebody to plunder Satan’s house and shake things up. But Jesus’ statement begs a question: just who is

stronger than Satan? But here’s the good news! Mark has been anticipating precisely this question for three chapters. Satan is strong; but Jesus is the stronger one to come.

The parable is gospel not because Jesus is being nice (like you’re supposed to be in a family) nor because Jesus is respecting the authorities. It is gospel because it portrays Jesus himself in the struggle for God’s coming reign. The word for gospel “good news” is not just a New Testament word, but goes back to Second Isaiah as well as Hellenistic culture.

The good news here is that God is not far off and disengaged, but already mixing it up, “in the struggle.” There is a beautiful grace in the notion that God, or in this case the Markan divine agent, Jesus, is not pleased that people are in bondage, subject to illness, mired in something less than life. I take comfort from that. The good news invites us into the central gospel struggle which has already begun with Jesus and his persistent ministry of healing, exorcism, and unmistakable forgiveness.” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org by David Schnasa Jacobsen*)

Readings for Further Study

- [1 John 5:19](#) *Jesus had come down to Satan’s “house”*
- [John 17:15/Luke 4:18/Ephesians 4:8](#) *Jesus came to bind Satan/plunder his “goods” which are souls of men*

Thought for the Day

”The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.” ~ *Zephaniah 3:16*

A Prayer

We beseech You, Master, to be our helper and protector. Save the afflicted among us; have mercy on the lowly; Raise up the fallen; appear to the needy; heal the ungodly; Restore the wanderers of Your people; Feed the hungry; ransom our prisoners; Raise up the sick; comfort the faint-hearted. ~ *St Clement of Rome, 1st century-101 AD Amen.*