

Sermon Proper 5  
Year B  
CCM  
June 6, 2021

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

While there have been so many joyful moments during my years as a priest, there have also been some really heart-breaking moments as well. This morning, I am remembering a particular conversation with a member of one congregation who had received some grim news as to a medical diagnosis. When we started our conversation, I assumed that he would want to talk about his death. But that's not where he started at all.

"Rob, I'm not afraid of death," he said. I am afraid that I will be found out."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I am afraid that they will find out that I am not who I say that I am; that I am not who I want them to think that I am; that I have never been the person that I want to be."

In other words, he was primarily afraid because he knew that there were cracks in his façade, that what he presented to the outside world, to his family, friends, and colleagues, was not the same as who he was on the inside, that he was, in a very real sense, a house divided, and ultimately a house divided against itself cannot stand.

We are presently in Year B of the three-year cycle of lessons that we call the Lectionary. That means that from now until All Saints Sunday, most all of the Gospel readings we will hear together on Sunday mornings will be from the Gospel of Mark. In addition to being the shortest of the four Gospel accounts, the author of Mark has some very particular themes that he wants us to hear, to consider, and to pray about. And one of those themes is the danger captured in this morning's parable about divided houses and the horrible destruction that ensues when they fall.

From the very beginning of Mark's account Jesus engages with deep division. By the time we reach today's passage, he has already cast out demons, healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law, cleansed a leper, and has given to a paralytic the ability to walk. Whether it had been demonic possession or illness that has separated them from the rest of their communities, Jesus has addressed the real divisions in their lives and has restored them to wholeness and strength.

Remember that, for Mark, demonic possession and physical illness were signs that Satan, who Jesus refers to as “the strong man” in this parable, had invaded their lives and torn them apart. Their lives were under Satan’s control. They have been living in isolation and in pain. Their conditions have led them to be separated from those around them, relationships that give us in this life identity and security and self-worth and joy. Again remember that in Mark’s Gospel, there is no separation of physical health from spiritual health. They are interconnected. And whenever illness exists, it is a sign that “the strong man” has entered in.

And let’s speak to one another frankly this morning. We are living with all kinds of division and conflict in this present moment: marriages ending in divorce; siblings no longer speaking to each other, politics reduced to vitriol; an economy that creates “the haves” and “the have nots.” Let’s pray about this this morning. Can you recall another time in your life when our nation’s communities have been so deeply divided? Instead of loving our neighbors as ourselves, we have descended into tribalism, into “us versus them”, when anyone who doesn’t think like us, or act like us, or agree with us, is automatically labeled “the enemy.” Instead of love, there is suspicion, anger, and even hate. We are a house divided. And Jesus tells us this morning what ultimately happens to divided houses.

Of course, one of the key points that Jesus is making in this passage from Mark is that division of any kind is the result of sin. Furthermore, we have all experienced division, both internally and externally. We know what it is like when our “outsides” and “insides” don’t match up. When we’re one person at work and another at home. When we act one way towards certain people and completely another way towards others. Instead of being the whole person God has created us to be, we divide ourselves into pieces: our work life, our family life, our church life, our social life, our prayer life. And in dividing ourselves into pieces, we lose our way, and we lose ourselves, and we lose touch with the God who has called us into being in the first place.

The Good News proclaimed by Mark this morning is that, because of God’s love for us, Jesus has come to bind Satan, pick up the pieces of our divided lives, restore us, and make us whole again. Furthermore, no one is going to stop him. Not the strong man, not sin, not disease or possession, not the ruling authorities who prefer the status quo, not even his own family who have come to the conclusion that he is out of his mind. He is the incarnation of unity, wholeness, integrity, and integration. He is the source of grace, strength, love, and peace. He is the stronger one who is willing to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves... pull us back together...if we only have faith.

Finally, we might think on first read that Jesus is acting harshly towards his immediate family in this passage. But I don’t think that is the case. He has a mission to fulfill and that mission is about restoring the world his Father had created. That means calling all of God’s children back into God’s will, which is to love God with all that we are and all that we have, and we will always do that best when we love our

neighbors as God loves us. In this sense, family is not about flesh and blood. Family is about loving others because that is God's will for us.

I will leave you with several questions to think and pray about this week: What do you think God's will is particularly for this congregation in the coming year, and in the coming five years? Incarnating Christ's love, how can we best continue to heal our community and raise up the broken and the broken-hearted? How will we embody the forgiveness necessary to bring those who are alienated and alone back into the family of God? And how will we contribute to overcoming these deep divisions that exist and work for the unity that we know by faith is God's greatest hope and desire for us? Because, my sisters and brothers, a house divided cannot stand.

Amen.