

Samuel 8:4-11, (12-15), 16-20, (11:14-15)

Psalm 138 2

Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Mark 3:20-35

Christianity is not a spectator sport. Let me say that again: “Christianity is not a spectator sport.” It’s a very sacred endeavor with certain parameters and expectations. As Jesus has so clearly shown us, we can’t take a look at what’s going on around us, pronounce that it shouldn’t be that way, and then go about business as usual ignoring the shortcomings of the status quo. If the status quo were OK...if people were building social structures and systems that reflected the values of God, Jesus wouldn’t have needed to come to earth to rescue us in the first place. From the Garden of Eden until the 21st century world, the status quo is not OK...it never has been...and it isn’t now. And we are... each one of us...responsible for that. Each individual church is the body of Christ...with it’s own personality, it’s own resources, it’s own methods of doing business, it’s own treasured liturgical idiosyncrasies, it’s own surrounding community and it’s own definition of its mission. All the mission statements for all the churches are very similar, but each one of them is unique to its own congregation. Do each of you know what our mission statement is? I suspect that no one has committed it to memory, but that wouldn’t be a bad goal for any of us. According to our own church documents, our mission is to ‘bring ourselves and our neighbors into the kingdom of God through worship, evangelism, and service.’ It’s a lovely statement, but I’m not sure any of us could explain to a visitor exactly what that means or how it’s done. The sister statement of the Mission Statement is our Vision Statement which is: “We are a Christ-centered congregation embracing all God's children through God's love and grace.” That’s a lovely definition of both how we see ourselves and what we hope to become. These statements are crafted and updated by the Vestry every few years with input from the congregation as well, but we rarely ever talk about how we put 2 those two statements into action. But Jesus did tell us what actions he expected from us

beyond going into all the world to preach the gospel. We know we are living in an imperfect world. It's all around us. We can't escape it. So, as Christians, what are we going to do about that? Did Jesus give us the blueprint for what to do? Yes, he did. All of the instructions are in the four gospels. As Christians, are we doing it? That's a good question for us to ponder and to pray on continuously...together and in our own private prayers. Here we are in the third chapter of the gospel of Mark that we have just heard and Jesus has already -been baptized and received the Holy Spirit -wrestled with Satan in the wilderness for 40 days -begun his ministry in Galilee by cleansing lepers, exorcizing demons, healing Peter's mother, healing a paralytic, answering questions about fasting, and explaining the purpose of the Sabbath -called his first few disciples, Matthew the tax collector being one of the first -generated a crowd of followers that makes it almost impossible for him to move around. And in the beginning of this third chapter of Mark, he gets into a boat to protect himself from the crowd, he calls the remaining disciples to the top of a mountain and designates them as apostles because he is going to send them out as messengers to spread the Gospel. And then he goes home. When most of us contemplate 'going home' we generally think of a place that is safe for us...a place where we belong...a place where we can take refuge from the onslaughts of the larger world...a place that supports us and nourishes us...a place where we are understood and accepted. That's what we expect and what we would like, but that's not necessarily the reality of our home of origin. And that's not what Jesus finds when he goes home either. The religious authorities are already keeping a very close eye on him. From their perspective, Jesus is a troublemaker. He's shaking things up. He's pointing out to people the obvious fallacies in the system in which they are living. He's making trouble...the kind of trouble that Congressman John Lewis used to call 'good trouble.'...shining a spotlight on what's wrong!! Jesus is looking at all the ways that people are being mistreated and all the physical limitations they struggle with. He's pointing out how badly the system is rigged by the powerful and wealthy to exploit the poor and powerless and he's taking action to rectify the things he sees that are different from what God intended for His creation...if only to verbalize them! And that's not OK with the people who wield the power in Jesus' world. It's never OK with the people who wield the power. And then...when Jesus goes home, instead of finding a place of refuge, he finds that his family...along with a number of his former neighbors...think he has lost his mind. From their perspective, who in their

right mind would be provocative and stir up trouble with the powers that be? They could hurt him...and eventually they did. But Jesus is not deterred. He's come to open people's eyes...and to open their hearts...and to give them courage to act. He has come to heal their infirmities. He has come to teach them about the nature of the kingdom of God. He has come with Good News. But Jesus is encircled by people working against him. On the one side of him there stands the religious authority desperately trying to trap him and shut him up. On the other side of him is the swelling crowd that makes it almost impossible for him to move around or even eat a meal. Periodically he has to escape them by getting in a boat and drifting out on the water or going to the top of a mountain where they won't follow him. And now it seems, it's his biological family that is getting in the way. They want to take him home and keep him under wraps so he won't get hurt. All these forces are encircling him and in the center is Jesus doing battle with Satan once again...the force that wants to corrupt all parts of God's creation. What a distraction from how he is trying to do his ministry! And it's a distraction to us, too. Think of all the very attractive diversions that pull us away from the things we're pretty sure Jesus wants us to be doing! We're all too familiar with wrestling with Satan. And sometimes we lose! Jesus has come to liberate each one of us from these forces that would prevent us from being all that God has created each one of us to be. But it won't happen without a struggle...and sometimes the struggle is within us. People with power never relinquish power voluntarily. And inertia is a powerful force. Not doing anything is easier than doing something particularly when we don't know quite what to do in our own circumstance. Not knowing what to do can stop us in our tracks. Everything that Jesus does to disrupt the status quo is viewed by those in power as troublemaking. Jesus is certainly making trouble for them. One way to discredit Jesus is to declare that he is in league with Beelzebub...with Satan. Otherwise, they say, how could he exorcise demons from those possessed? Jesus wisely points out that Satan couldn't do battle with Satan, so that accusation isn't even logical. And Jesus observes that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Jesus can exorcise the demons simply because he is more powerful than Satan...but that's not obvious to the folks who are watching him in real time. And then Jesus reveals the unforgiveable sin for all of us...the one thing for which there is no redemption in God's eyes. Jesus says that whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven...ever...The religious leaders then are guilty of an eternal sin because

they have accused Jesus of having an 'unclean' spirit. They have accused him of being possessed by Satan. They have blasphemed the Holy Spirit within Jesus. So there Jesus is...surrounded on the one side by the every-present overwhelming crowd and on another side by the all-powerful religious authorities and on still another side by his biological family that has declared him insane. These forces are pressing in against him all the while he's trying to do battle with Satan. It's hard to imagine how this scene must have looked to his newly appointed apostles...those being sent out into the world to spread Jesus' message about the kingdom of God. And how does it look to us to see Jesus surrounded by forces determined to thwart him? Is it enough to stop us in our tracks, too? Even then, in the time of Jesus' ministry, Christianity was not a spectator sport. Jesus was not about not taking sides. Jesus was about calling out injustice. Jesus was all about compassion for all people. Jesus was all about the dignity of every human being...just as we say that we are. 2 Those trying to practice Christianity are going to run into some resistance. Sometimes it's serious resistance. But Jesus did not send us out into the world just to watch what goes on. Jesus did not send us out into the world to be spectators. Jesus sent us out into the world to share his message...God's message...with others. He sent us out into the world to spread the word...the Good News about Jesus Christ and God's love for all of God's creation. Jesus sent us out into the world to do something for the benefit of all...to stir up a little good trouble! How're we doing? For all the guidance we've been given as well as the will to do His will.....

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.

**Mission Statement:**

Our mission is to bring ourselves and our neighbors into the kingdom of God through worship, evangelism, and service.

**Vision Statement:**

We are a Christ-centered congregation embracing all God's children through God's love and grace.

**We will show our commitment to our mission and our vision by:**

- I. Reaching out, inviting, welcoming and engaging all in our communities, locally and abroad, with love and acceptance.
- II. Equipping disciples to carry Christ's love to others regardless of need or background.
- III. Providing a rich, inspiring and life changing experience through the beauty and tradition of Episcopal worship.
- IV. Generously caring for and ensuring the future of our parish family