

Sermon Proper 5 2018

June 10, 2018

Mark 3:20-35

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

As Jesus says those words, **“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand,”** I can’t help but think how pertinent they are for our day. As we look around us we see division upon division. We see the division of liberal and conservative. We see the division of races. We see the division of genders and “sexual identities.” We see the divisions of classes, cultures, faiths, etc., etc., etc.

In fact, as I have been reading about this, I have found something interesting. In many ways, the reason that we see this division goes back to Karl Marx. As I’m sure many of you are familiar with, Marx understood history to be a constant battle between classes—between the upper class who oppressed and the lower class which was oppressed. As a note, this is where he called religion the opiate of the masses. He said it allowed the oppressed to be lulled into satisfaction with their oppression. Now, Marx focused on this oppressor versus oppressed in economic terms. Today that has been shifted to every other kind of classification. And what does it do? It creates division. The Christians are seen as oppressing non-Christians. Whites who are seen as oppressing people of color. The heterosexuals who are oppressing the homosexuals, and the cis-genders the other genders. As you look at the world, that is why there is so much animosity in so many places. So many of us have been taught to understand the world in view of these divisions, and with the assumption that those who are in the position of oppressing others are going to use power and even authority to do this. This is why there is so much attention on police shootings and the like. The assumption is that when a police officer shoots someone of another race, it’s inherently racially motivated.

Now as I say all of this, this all requires nuance and gentleness to discuss. Why? Because these things do happen. Are there police who abuse their authority? Of course, this is a sin fallen world, and all policemen are human, which means that just like you and me, they are sinners. Likewise, there are those who use authority to mistreat others under their authority. Jesus shows us that this is utterly opposed to the reason for which He gives authority, but it’s the reality.

That being said, this also reflects the reality of our world: it is broken. It is fallen. It is divided. And as we say that, we see that this is exactly what Satan wants. In fact, as we look at the name devil, that is what it literally means. The Greek is “*diabolos*”—and hopefully you can hear that this is where we get the term diabolical for things associated with the devil. “*Diabolos*” means literally the one who cuts through, “*dia*” through, as in a diameter, a measure through, and “*ballo*” which means to throw or cast. But that’s who the devil is, the one who divides. Now as I say this, we have to understand how the devil divides. And that is indicated in what word *diabolos* came to be understood as, what the word “Satan” means: the accuser. In Hebrew, your Satan was your accuser. When Jesus speaks of Satan, he is your accuser.

What does that mean? It means that the devil comes and he throws your sin in your face. He says to you “look at what you have done! You have sinned against God and against your neighbor, you are a vile and disgusting thing!” Actually, first he draws you into that sin, just like we heard with Adam and Eve. He draws you in and he tells you, “look at how beautiful and appealing this is. Look at how much you’ll enjoy the security of money, the pleasures of greed and gluttony, the sensual delight of lust, the satisfaction of gossip and judgment. Look at how wonderful it will be enjoying those things.” He tells you that, and then when you fall prey to that temptation, he throws it back in your face reminding you of just how despicable those things really are.

If you’ve ever met someone who had abusing parents, or even ones who were overly critical, you know how this affects people. You can see in them the way that correction brings them back to the memory of destruction of their person. That’s what this accusation does. It destroys that person. It crushes them. It is truly oppressive.

Now, as I often say, does that mean that we can’t correct? Does that mean that we can’t speak God’s Law? Does it mean that we shouldn’t acknowledge the reality of how offensive our sin is? Absolutely not. But what we have to understand is how this accuser, this divider uses that against us. What does he do?

Well look at what we saw in the reading from Genesis. Here Adam and Eve had just eaten the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They had just fallen into sin, and what happened? God comes walking in the garden, and where is the happy couple? Luther speaks of the Tree of Life as the place where they would commune with God, is that where the two are? Are they meeting with God, enjoying

communion with Him, life with their blessed and good Creator? No. The opposite. They've hidden from Him. Why? They've sinned. They're afraid. This divider, this accuser has drawn them into sin and now they see things they didn't before. Now instead of loving God and each other, they are hiding from God and covering themselves in self-concern. And what happens as a result of this sin?

That's just after our reading for this morning. **"To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.' And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it," cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.'"**

So what do we see? We see this divider, this accuser having drawn mankind into sin and as he has done that, he has drawn them into the real oppression. Not the oppression of classes, or races, or genders –although we do see here the “battle of the sexes” beginning. The desire of the woman to have power, and the husband abusing his God given authority and domineering over her. But in all of this, what is the real oppression? Death. It's the death that comes from sin. It's the death that shows itself in being cut off from the Tree of Life, the death that shows itself in the toiling of the brow, in the pain of child birth, in the thorns and thistles. The divider, the accuser has now become not merely the enemy, but the enemy who has been given the dominion once intended for man. He has taken that dominion and in that he has become the tyrannical strongman that Jesus spoke of when He said, **"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."** You see under the accusation, under the division of the *diabolos*, you are stuck in the strong man's house. You are captive to the whim of the strong man. You are trapped in the dungeon of the evil one who will gladly abuse you and oppress you under suffering, trials, and pain. And just like many victims of abuse, sadly you have taken upon yourself to accept it and even put your stamp of approval on it by virtue of your own sin.

But Christians, thanks be to God, as we have been talking about Genesis within this parable of the dividing strong man, there is hope. There is the hope that God

Himself promised right after the fall, the hope promised when He said, **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”** That is, the hope of the Stronger Man, the One who has bound up the strong man and overcome his house. It is the hope of Jesus.

Christians, Jesus is the One who has entered into the house of the strong man and who has freed you. That accusation that, truly, you rightly deserve, that accusation has been solved in Him. The sin that should keep you hiding from God has been placed on Him, atoned for and forgiven. It has been nailed to the cross so that as His blood was shed for it, He was divided from His Father, crying out **“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.”** He was oppressed under that burden of death, He was crushed and given the burden of the thorns placed upon His brow. And the rule of this oppression was broken in the resurrection of the Offspring of Woman on the first Easter. There, having had His heel struck, Jesus crushed the head of the serpent and freed you from that oppression, freed you from that accusation, from that division from God.

How do you know? Because the news of that victory has entered into your brain and heart as He has spoken into your ear, “I forgive you all of your sins.” Because His waters of baptism drowned the old man burdened by the accusation of the law, and raised a new one who lives, not under the guilt of selfishness, but in the freedom of love; love of God and love of every neighbor. Because He has fed you with His very body and blood uniting Himself with you that you would know you are no longer divided from Him. He has found you and unites Himself with you.

And in that Christians, we see the beauty of true unity. We see revealed the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in their love for us. We see that love uniting righteous God to fallen man. We see the hope that is ours as Christians. To be clear, that hope isn't that we can overcome our divisions here on earth—we should always work toward that in the example that we have in Christ—but the hope is the promise of the day where we will enjoy perfect unity and community with our Lord and with each other. The promise of the kingdom which is not divided, but perfectly united under the perfect God and King, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.