

## SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

### Second Sunday After Pentecost

June 6, 2021

#### Psalm 130:1–8 (ESV):

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!

2 O Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

3 If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,

O Lord, who could stand?

4 But with you there is forgiveness,

that you may be feared.

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,

and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord

more than watchmen for the morning,

more than watchmen for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the LORD!

For with the LORD there is steadfast love,

and with him is plentiful redemption.

8 And he will redeem Israel

from all his iniquities.

#### First Reading: Genesis 3:8–15 (ESV):

8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman

whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

14 The LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,  
cursed are you above all livestock  
and above all beasts of the field;  
on your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.

15 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.”

#### **EPISTLE: 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1 (ESV):**

13 Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, 14 knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. 15 For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

#### **Our Heavenly Dwelling**

5 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

### **THE GOSPEL - Mark 3:20–35 (ESV):**

**20** Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat.

**21** And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”

**22** And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” **23** And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “**How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. 27 But 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.**

**28** “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, **29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” — 30** for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

### **Jesus’ Mother and Brothers**

**31** And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. **32** And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” **33** And he answered them, “**Who are my mother and my brothers?**” **34** And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “**Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.**”

### **Sermon 23 – Second Sunday After Pentecost**

**“God Mugs Satan?”**

**Mark 3:20-35**

Dear friends,

In our Gospel lesson today you have a very drastic misunderstanding going on, and one that is far more common than we like to admit. Jesus' words here are a statement of intent that is intended to explain His actions. So Jesus is trying to tell people what He is doing and why He is doing it, but He says it in such a not straightforward and very unintuitive manner, so much so that you wonder if He is deliberately misleading people. Obviously God doesn't do that, so what is Jesus doing? Well, He is pointing out the misunderstanding, He is bringing it forward. Sometimes Jesus teaches us by telling us things. Sometimes Jesus teaches us by showing us things. Here, both are at work. What Jesus says is what happens, even when the people don't even know that they're participating in the object lesson.

I find it absolutely hilarious that we are not three chapters into the book of Mark and already everyone thinks Jesus is crazy. Mark makes Jesus look crazy sometimes, at least by our standards. Mark has barely even begun His book and Jesus' family thinks that Jesus has lost His mind and needs to be corralled. The authorities think the same thing, only they take it a step farther. Jesus will tell them in this very lesson that they have taken it much too far, more on that later. Jesus starts off fast and strong in Mark, he gets baptized right off the bat and He's recruiting His disciples before the first chapter is even half over. After that it is this blitz of healing and preaching, and throughout Jesus seems like He is trying to antagonize the religious authorities of the day. He isn't, but the things that He does go contrary to the rules that they've put in place, and in some instances run counter to God's own commandments. Jesus doesn't fast the way the Pharisees and even John the Baptizer's disciples do, they don't follow what is considered a religiously serious lifestyle. Just before this reading, Jesus seems to violate the rules about working on the Sabbath, which, don't forget, is a commandment, the Third. It's very easy to cheer Jesus on when He's breaking human rules, when He's going against the heavy-handed religious

authorities. We Americans like that, because we were born from rebellion and still have that rebellious spirit inside of us. But right before this, Jesus seems to be breaking God's own rules, which is a very serious matter. Obviously Jesus isn't, so what is He doing?

One of the things that Mark is most concerned with is showing us the stark differences between who Jesus really was and who we expect Him to be. This is Mark's way of making the case that Jesus was indeed God, the Son of God. If God is bigger than us and knows more than us, if God is God, He will behave in ways that surprise us, and if we are sinners, those surprises will not always be nice, neat, and cute. Sometimes, a Holy God is going to behave in ways sinners think is just weird, or offensive, or even evil. Mark is showing us that Jesus is God indeed, the very Son of God, and that means Jesus has the right to do the things that Jesus does. The Pharisees and scribes don't believe this, so obviously they take issue with it.

On to the reading. **“Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. 21 And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”** This is not incredibly important to the passage, but I don't want you to skip it. Jesus' own family thinks He has lost His mind and we are three chapters in. Imagine one of your family members doing any of this, healing, speaking weird things in church at weird times, deliberately breaking the church rules. It would be embarrassing and worrying. Thanksgiving Dinner with Jesus would've been awkward as heck, but more to the point, Jesus' own family has lost their sense of who Jesus is. Mary has been repeatedly told and demonstrated as to who Jesus is, it is Mary herself that had been miraculously conceived, that happened to her own body, but she has lost sight of it for a bit. Human instinct is so powerful, and human instinct is sin. Nobody wants to make a scene, and parents sometimes react a little too strongly when one of their children is the one making a scene.

Tellingly, it's not just Jesus' family. The scribes, as they do so often in the Gospels, take this one step further. **“22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were**

saying, **“He is possessed by Beelzebul,”** and **“by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.”** I said earlier this was much too far, and Jesus agrees. Think about what has just happened here. The religious authorities, specifically the scribes, the Bible experts of the day, have just accused Jesus of being Satan. God has appeared to them, God has been healing their diseases, casting out demons, preaching “repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand” and these guys think He is Satan. To put it in those bold-faced terms really struck me. God and Satan are polar opposites, aren't they? Shouldn't it be horribly obvious to us which is God and which is Satan? Shouldn't there be a really big night-and-day difference in how the two of them act?

This is a harsh, real reminder that we are naturally, as sinners, more sympathetic to Satan than to God. It may not seem like it, but that's what being a sinner means, that we are more in line with Satan than with God. This is why I talk so often about us being God's enemies. It's not just fancy rhetoric, I really do mean it. In John 8 Jesus told the Jews their father was the devil, and the same accusation can be leveled against all humanity. We see things more as Satan would see them than God would see them, which means that, to us, God looks evil. This accounts for, even now, as a Christian, maybe a Christian for a long time, some of the things that God lets happen, some of the things that God Himself does, look awfully suspect. They look strange, they make us squirm a little, because they look petty, mean, or sometimes just downright evil. There will be times in your life, my dear Christian friends, where you are still Christian, you have not ceased to believe, you're not even really angry at God, but you will look at God, and deep down, somewhere in your heart, you'll say to yourself: That looks awful. Wow, God, that looks really bad. That looks... evil.

Look at how Jesus reacts, though, with joy, look at it, because this is such a wonderful picture of Jesus. Does Jesus roar in outrage over this gross violation of His holiness? Does He rightly smite these unbelieving scribes and Pharisees for daring to compare Him with His evil foe? Does Jesus smack 'em around to try to wake them up, or

quote Scripture at them? No. He tells them a story instead, and then very calmly and very cleanly outlines the consequences of what they're doing.

**“23 And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. 27 But 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.”** First, Jesus calls them out on how stupid they sound. Sure, guys, Satan is casting out Satan. What would that accomplish? Satan is coming to an end, Jesus says, and He should know, because Jesus Himself is bringing Satan to His end, by vanquishing sin for good and being raised from the dead. That's what Jesus says next. No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder His goods, unless one binds the strong man. That is what Jesus is doing with Satan as He speaks. He is binding Satan and stealing Satan's goods. Obviously Satan doesn't have a bank account, so what does this mean?

Remember, Satan has one goal and one goal only: He wants lots of people to go to hell with him, as many as possible. Satan is the ultimate sore loser, if he can't play the game, he doesn't want anyone else playing, and if they do play, he wants to make everyone as miserable as possible. With that in mind, Jesus is reminding us of His ultimate purpose as well as the devil's. The devil wants to drag souls into hell with Him. Jesus wants to save us from the fires of hell and from Satan's lies. So, Jesus is, by speaking the truth, by doing miracles of healing and exorcism, tying down Satan and taking the souls that belong to Him. It's a wonderful picture. Jesus the burgler, Jesus the mugger, just overpowering Satan to steal people from Satan's grasp. To steal sinners from under the nose of the one who invented sin in the first place. Jesus is here to steal us. By freeing us from sin and death, each of us is stolen from the fate of the devil. It's a parable, of course, which Mark points out, so its not exactly the most intuitive way to say it, but Jesus says

it. He is here, walking this earth, preaching and teaching, casting out demons, yes, even breaking the rules, for you. To free you. Steal you from hell and take you to heaven to be with Him. It is such a wonderful picture.

Now the warning comes. **“28 “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— 30 for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”** Like I said, I read this as Jesus speaking calmly. Not yelling, not angry, but explaining the unpleasant facts of the situation. What the scribes and the Pharisees have done is tell Jesus, the Son of God, that He is Satan. Jesus finally responds to this by telling them that this is not going to be forgiven them. The sin against the Holy Spirit seems like such a big deal, the one sin that can't be forgiven, right? What is that sin? Thinking that Jesus is Satan. It's pretty stark when you put it that way.

We know we're sinners, but we're Christians, why would we ever do such a thing? I have never once said out loud that I thought Jesus was the devil. But I have often told God that He was being mean, that He didn't care, that He wasn't doing things right. I have thought it more often. Life gets hard, and God is sometimes the reason why life gets hard. The sinner inside of us bristles at this, and wants to lash out at God for doing so. If you're anything like me, you've done it enough to make you worry. Maybe, you just regret a little too hard how God chose to do things. Did you have to do it that way, God? Did you have to make it hurt that much, God? Ultimately, this is the first commandment, as so many things are. Jesus is warning you, here today, that He takes that first commandment, you shall have no other gods before me, with utmost seriousness. To reject Jesus as God, to reject God as the God of your life, is to put yourself in immortal danger, eternal danger. What Jesus offers is liberation from that strongman, freedom from the guilt of sin, the death of the body, and the hopelessness of life. He will continue to offer it so long as He continues to remain in heaven, so long as this world continues to turn. But He will not



offer it forever, and He does not take it lightly when you reject it. Does this mean that it's all hopeless? Far from it. This means that *we* are hopeless, and that is very different. No human being can do this. The Pharisees didn't. The scribes didn't. Even Jesus' family didn't, they thought Jesus had gone bonkers. Jesus is difficult in Mark, He's sharp, He's abrupt, He does lots of strange things. This is to show you just how seriously Jesus takes sin, takes His mission to free us from the strongman. This is to show you just how perilous sin is, how dangerous and natural and seductive it is. We've all sinned against the first commandment, but Jesus doesn't reject us, just like He didn't reject the Pharisees. He warns us instead. Salvation is here. I'm going to free you. Take it. You have taken it, you lot, through your faith. You believe in this Jesus and that is just great. Remember that so much could've changed, so much could've gone differently, and give thanks to God that you believe in Jesus. You were taken from the clutches of the strongman, a devil that hated you and just wanted you to suffer as much as he does. You were taken from that fate into the arms of a mighty, powerful, and very strange God, who made it His mission to save you. You cannot sin against the Holy Spirit when the Holy Spirit has been given to you, your rejection of God never lasts so long as your faith keeps hold of you. We sinners may sulk, we may pout, we may lash out against God in our weaker or more vulnerable moments. None of that changes God's mission, God's design for you, or His love and care for you. He is here to take you out of that, to nurture that repentance that always rears its head. We may do all those things, but like a child to a Father, we return to God and say, I'm sorry, I just got mad. And God smiles and says, welcome home my son. It is good to see you.

Amen