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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Second Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 5B)

June 7, 2015

Text: Mark 3:20–35

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It's an old, old story: children disappointing their parents. In Greek mythology, Daedalus, a crafty inventor, created wings made from feathers, glued together using wax, for himself and his son, Icarus. Daedalus carefully instructed his son against pride while in flight which would tempt him to fly too high in the sky, too close to the sun. The sun's heat would melt the wax causing the feathers to fall off and he would plunge to his doom. Icarus disobeyed his father, soared to the clouds in joyous ecstasy only to realize, too late, that the wax was melting and the feathers were falling off. He plunged to his death, to the bitter disappointment of his father. This myth has been used for millennia as a means to teach children to obey their parents and avoid the sin of pride.

Jesus must have been a disappointment to his family and hometown friends, at least at first, at least at the time being described in Mark 3. Vs. 20–21, “Then Jesus went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “‘He is out of his mind.’” The Son who could do no wrong, the boy who amazed the teachers of the Law when He was 12 years old, has gone insane. He's gone off thinking He's some kind of Savior or prophet or who knows what. Best collect Him before He goes off and does something silly, shameful, or criminal.

And wouldn't you know it...other people think he's crazy too. No, it's worse than that. They think he's demon possessed. Vs. 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 demons.’” Such opinions and conclusions about the Lord Jesus may surprise us. How could they think such things about Jesus?

Two things need to be said about that. First, they were in the midst of the events. We look at these things with the benefit of hindsight. We know the end of the story. Jesus is exactly who He says He is, the eternal Son of the Father come in flesh and blood, and does exactly what He meant to do, die by crucifixion and rise again for the

salvation of all people. But we see the life of Jesus through the lens of Easter victory. And well we should. But we ought not immediately think, Mary, the Lord's family members, or even the Scribes are complete imbeciles for thinking these things about Jesus. How often have we had to correct our premature conclusions once we get more information or see how events unfold?

Second, we must never underestimate the obstinacy of our fallen, sinful nature. In the face of almost irrefutable evidence, our sinful nature does not want to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come. The carnal mind resists the holy things of God. Mary, Jesus' family, the scribes from Jerusalem did not and could receive the things of God being revealed through the preaching and healing ministry of Jesus.

All they could see and hear was this otherwise ordinary Jewish man, with no credentials, making the most outrageous claims, and performing the most uncanny, supernatural things. The first words of the Lord Jesus, recorded in Mark's gospel, are, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (1:15). Who is this no-name carpenter from that no-nothing town of Nazareth? And what does he think he's doing claiming to be some kind of prophet? Declaring that God's kingdom is come and we must repent? And He's supposed to be the one who knows? And all those so-called healings, well, that just as easily could be from the devil!

Jesus shows this kind of thinking to be silly. Vs. 23–26, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 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. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end." If demons are truly be cast out – as they appear to be – then that work cannot be by a demon possessed person. Otherwise, the demonic kingdom falls from within.

Jesus declares this cannot be the case. Instead, a kingdom must be destroyed from the outside. Vs. 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." That is who Jesus claims to be and what He claims to be doing. He's the strong man plundering Satan's kingdom by casting out his demons and forcing his kingdom to yield to his power and authority. Through the Lord's gospel preaching, demons are cast out and those who were under Satan's bondage are set free. Jesus plunders Satan's kingdom through the power of the Holy Spirit who works in, with, and under the Gospel of the Lord Jesus.

It is not without reason that we confess in the Small Catechism that “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” Our fallen, sinful nature does not want God and fights against the things of God. The Holy Spirit must first enlighten us with His gifts of faith and trust so that we can see rightly and understand who Jesus is and what He’s doing.

That’s what makes the accusation of the scribes all the more deadly. “He is possessed by Beelzebul” and “by the prince of demons he casts out demons” (vs. 22). They are attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to the work of Satan. Such thinking turns the whole means by which God the Trinity works faith and salvation on its head. The Holy Spirit is the person of the Holy Trinity who creates and sustains saving faith.

The Holy Spirit is, as I said earlier, in, with, and under all that God does to save humanity. If sinful humanity attributes that activity to Satan, then there is no hope for repentance, no hope for salvation. They are rejecting the means by which God works. Jesus warns against this gravest of all sins in vs. 28–30, “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”—for they had said, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’”

Consider, for a few moments, the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of Christ. We confess in the Creed that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit as revealed in Luke 1. When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. And according to Mark 1:12, the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to face the devil for 40 days and 40 nights. In today’s text, Jesus claims that the Holy Spirit is working through Him to release men and women from Satan’s bondage. The apostle Peter preached, in Acts 10:38, that Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit so that the Lord could go about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. Jesus, in John’s gospel, promised to send the Holy Spirit upon His beloved Church so that they would rightly confess who Jesus is and what He did to save the world. And through the Holy Spirit, the Church would forgive or retain sins in Christ’s name.

In other words, the Holy Spirit works from beginning to end through Christ’s ministry and through Christ’s Church. To attribute that work of forgiveness and salvation to the devil is to speak so irreverently, with such vile contempt, so as to leave the person without any hope of forgiveness in this life or the life to come.

From time to time, people will ask me if it's possible that they've committed the unforgiveable sin and how would they know it. My response is almost always the same. If you're concerned about such a thing, you're just fine. The Holy Spirit is working in your life, leading you to daily repentance and faith.

It's when people show an absolute and utter contempt for Christ's Gospel and the things of God that I become frightened for their eternal well-being. Gross sins can be committed – murder, adultery, pride, thievery, villainy, you name it – and there remains hope for repentance and faith; all sins will be forgiven, says Jesus. And yes, there must be repentance. God's Law can be brought to bear on their sin so that the gospel of forgiveness can be received. But cold indifference or hot contempt to the Gospel ministry of Christ and His Church is virtually unreachable. There is no other God-given means of release from Satan's bondage than through the Gospel of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens people through the good news of who Jesus is and what He did to save the world. He is the strong man that plundered Satan's kingdom and brought you and His beloved Church out of darkness and into His marvelous light and life. Through the Holy Spirit, you are born again to a living hope through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus may have been a disappointment to His family at the time of Mark 3. But by Easter and certainly by the Day of Pentecost, Mary and Jesus' family were all filled with the Holy Spirit and devoted followers of Jesus. Take heart, be strong and courageous, saints of God. The Lord is with you wherever you go, giving you wisdom and understanding about His eternal kingdom, saving you from Satan's dominion, giving you faith in His promises, and working through you in love so that you might grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. In those promises and in that salvation, you will never be disappointed.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.