

Sermon - 06-06-21
Ps 138: 1 Sam 8:4-20 (11:14-15);
2 Cor 4:13-5:1; Mk 3:20-35

In the film *The Usual Suspects*, Verbal Kint, aka Keyser Söze, says, “The best trick the devil ever pulled was to convince the world that he doesn’t exist.”

In the first half of the 19th c, John Wilkinson wrote:

“One of the artifices of Satan is to induce men to believe that he does not exist: another, perhaps equally fatal, is to make them fancy that he is obliged to stand quietly by, and not to meddle with them, if they get into true silence.” (*Quakerism Examined*, 1836, John Wilkinson, quoteinvestigator.com accessed 05-31-21)

This is the dark reality of keeping silent when evil is stealing all the good things from humanity.

So, you may have trouble imagining Satan as a red scaly humanoid creature with horns and a long tail. Whatever you see in your mind’s eye at the mention of the devil, Jesus assures us that the evil force of opposition to the grace and goodness of God does exist. This evil perpetrator is the “strong man” that oppresses and commandeers the “house” or the “family” of the world, or the kingdom that people believe is theirs. Our Gospel passage for the day is framed around the theme of house or kingdom – I should say, “houses” and “kingdoms” plural. Jesus answers back to the scribes’ accusation that He is under the power of Satan. Recognize what these church lawyers are saying. They are calling the Spirit of God – the Holy Spirit – a spirit of wickedness. What they say is itself evil.

Jesus answers the scribes with a famous saying, “A kingdom (or house) divided against itself cannot stand.” (vv 24-25) Jesus calls this kind of talk what it is – blasphemy. Blasphemy is speaking against God and sacred things. In our time, in the public marketplace, we might consider someone comparing the message of Hitler to the message of Jesus. That is a blasphemous quote. And Jesus says such sin is unforgivable. All through history bad teachers and evil advisors have had great pleasure in saying such profane things. What influence causes anyone to say such things? It is the influence of the Prince of the Air – Beëlzabub -- Satan himself.

The situation in our story for today is that Jesus and the disciples have become very busy in the region around Lake Galilee meeting the public, preaching, teaching and healing the people. Activity is so intense they can hardly stop to eat a meal in peace.

Jesus’ mother and brothers and sisters are concerned for Him. He is constantly moving about doing ministry. Certainly, the carpentry shop is being managed by Jesus’ brothers. He is too busy. They think He has lost His mind. There is a rift in Jesus’ family. The house of Joseph the carpenter is divided in that sense. The temple officials speak up and say that He has an evil spirit.

The kingdom of the world is under a strong influence from Satan. So huge is this evil influence in human minds and hearts that many deny that Satan exists or is doing wicked things. As Verbal Kint said, evil is so woven into our worldview that we don’t even notice it. The world celebrates the humanist mindset and claims the so-called advances of culture as their own doing. Some openly celebrate a godless existence. Others, who may be undecided, simply keep quiet when they see evil being done in the name of the “greater purpose.” Do not let this be you. This is a twisting of the truth – a distortion of reality. No spiritual reality is acknowledged in the world. The kingdom of God is not proclaimed at just the moment it should be proclaimed.

Jesus says, “Do you think it’s possible in broad daylight to enter the house of an awake, able-bodied man, and walk off with his possessions unless you tie him up first? Tie him up, though, and you can clean him out.” (Mk 3:27 MSG)

This saying goes two ways. Satan has come in laid hold of humanity’s spiritual treasures. When the house of humankind is in proper order, you and I are the strong proprietors – the managers and owners of the house, given to us by God. Humanity is bound – tied up – by the deception of the evil one. This is true.

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It Is also true that the “strong man” is this deceiver himself, holding humanity hostage in a spiritual lie. Jesus is the One who can bind him up and take back all that he has stolen from us. This was Jesus’ ministry everywhere He went. “...to bring good news to the poor. (God sent Him) “...to proclaim release to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18 & Is 61:1 ff)

Jesus does this by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not a curse – it is the greatest blessing in the history of the world. It is the blessing of the Spirit of God.

The wicked schemes of Satan will not overcome the great goodness of the Creator of the universe. The Prophet Isaiah says:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;
Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness;
Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!
Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes
And clever in their own sight! (Is 5:20-21)

Learn day by day to follow Jesus more closely – to obey His commandments – and to love Him more. You are created to bless the Holy Spirit. It is right to speak with reverence about God and the things of God. Bless and do not curse. When we bless the Holy Spirit, He blesses us and leads us in the way of Truth. Amen.