

3rd S. after Pentecost 6/9/24
Mark 3:20-35 5B

"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 am the youngest of 6 children, which means that I have 5 siblings -- 2 brothers and 3 sisters. For the most part, things went well, but there were those times when chaos and discord abounded – especially with 3 older sisters. Now, just to be clear – I never argued with them, I just explained to them why I was right. Alright, alright, chaos and discord erupted because we did not always see and do things **God's** way.

Jesus is teaching us in our Gospel that sin has torn apart our world, our communities and congregations, and even families – as we see in Jesus' own earthly family this morning. God's will is that we love one another; treating each other as God has treated us in Christ. Because, Jesus teaches us, A house divided against itself will be able to stand.

In our Gospel, the enemies of Jesus had a real problem on their hands. Jesus performed incredible miracles -- He cured the sick, healed the lame, and rescued the possessed from the vise grip of Satan. His opponents, the Jewish religious leaders, wanted to know where did He get His power and authority to work these miracles? Certainly, they thought and spoke, Jesus was sent by the devil and it was by the **power of the evil one** that Jesus did miracles.

Jesus responded to their sinful thinking, *"How can Satan cast out Satan?"* The goal of Satan is not to remove himself from the lives of people, but to remove God from our lives.

There is a Danish fable that tells of a young spider who lived in a large barn. One day, while crawling about on the ceiling, he looked down and saw a spot that seemed just perfect for a new home. So he came down on a thin filament of web until he reached that wonderful spot, and there he created a huge, beautiful web. He prospered. One day, while walking about his domain, he saw that thin filament of web reaching into the darkness above and thought to himself, I have no need of this, and so he cut it. The whole web (spider and all) came crashing to the ground and a big cow stepped on him! How very much we are like that you spider! We are quick to leave God's path, always with tragic results.

Satan is a master of deceit. He's much too smart to come as something frightening as a fire-breathing dragon, so he comes as a wolf in sheep's clothing, offering us offering pleasure and treasure, popularity and purpose. Like a good fisherman, he makes the bait enticing and the hooks deadly. This is why St. Paul warns us, *Be sober minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pt 5:8).*

Satan uses that old military strategy of divide and conquer, and he uses it with astounding success, dividing us from God and from one another. It is not as hard as you might think. Sadly, he often gets a lot of assistance from us. Satan rejoices when we stop coming to Church. Satan rejoices when we stop reading our Bibles and Catechisms; when we stop having devotions with our families. Satan loves it when we stop praying for our congregation and for each other. The old, evil foe is like a wolf who attacks the whole flock and, when he does, it's with the hope that just one little lamb will run off in their own direction and become easy prey.

Christians are all brothers and sisters in Christ, it's true. But sometimes we act too much like brothers and sisters -- the fighting kind of brothers and sisters! Of course, no one enjoys this more than Satan. He rejoices when Christians despise one another; when he can get the sun to set on our anger.

I need to make something quite clear about the nature of disagreement. Christ has called us to believe, teach, and confess the Six Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine, as we learn them from the *Small Catechism*, in all of their truth and purity. We cannot compromise doctrinally. If someone should say, for example, that we cannot baptize children anymore, we would have to stand on God Word, as we do in all questions of doctrine. On this point, remember it is those teaching false doctrine who are causing disagreements and disunion.

The one area we need to exercise caution in causing fights in the Church is in --[ready for a big word] -- “adiaphoria”. That fancy word means those things not commanded nor forbidden in the Bible. Let me give you an example: let’s say we decide to put new carpeting in the sanctuary. And some want tan carpet. But, you, you want blue carpet. The Bible does not say one word about what color of carpeting to have Church – in fact, it does not even say you have to have carpet at all – so, it means that, under the banner of Christian freedom, you are entitled to your own opinion. And, when there is disagreement in matters of adiaphorian, it does not mean someone is right or the other person wrong; nor that anyone is good and someone else bad.

Jesus says, *"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" (Mk 3:24-25). That's Satan's work; his mission is to divide and conquer.

But, Jesus came to unite and reconcile. He came to bring us together, to make us one again, with God and with one another. St. Paul said it this way, *When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son (Ro 5:10, NIV)*. Even though we deserve to be condemned and abandoned, God still loves us, reaches out to us, and embraces us.

A team of mountain climbers once braved the mighty Matterhorn in Switzerland. At a particularly difficult point one of the men lost his footing and fell back with a tremendous force. There he hung precariously at the end of his rope. His back was broken, and he was barely maintaining consciousness. One of the other climbers came down the mountainside, being careful of the unstable rock, and lowered himself to the man dangling below. Through the use of special safety lines and pulleys, he was able to rescue him from certain death.

That's what Christ did for us. He left the comfort of heaven to come down to us, lowering Himself to us, reaching out to us, embracing us, and restoring us. In our Gospel, Jesus said, *"But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man"* (v. 27). That's what Jesus did. By His death on Calvary's cross, He bound up that strong man – crushing his head. His blood washed away all the sin that separates us from God and from one another.

That's why Paul wrote these words, *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and same judgement (1 Cor 1:9-10)*. That's what it means to have the heart and mind

of Christ. We are one with God and with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and in the mission Christ has called us to do.

And, Christ most certainly knows the temptation before us as we carry out that mission and strive to live at peace with everyone. He, too, felt the full onslaught of Satan's attacks. He felt the wrath and rejection of a sinful world. That's why He lovingly promises, "*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Mt 28:20).

That's God promise to us. He has not promised a rose garden. Satan is alive and real, and he has you on his most wanted list. He is constantly at work to get us to cut our ties to Christ and His church and your brothers and sisters in Christ. But, Christ is always with us, to forgive us, to reconcile us, and to comfort us.

And He does that work in us through His spoken Word and the visible Word of the Sacraments. Christ feeds the faith He began at our baptism with the eating and drinking of our Lord's Body and Blood, so that we may rise and live as the "Little Christ" He has made us in our baptism.

And, every time we look at the cross, we are reminded there are 2 parts to the cross. As God reached out in love to us, we reach out in love to others.