

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REV. PATRICIA A. T. PITTSNOGLE
Pentecost 2 – June 7, 2015
Grace & Christ Lutheran Churches, Northumberland & Milton, Pennsylvania
TEXT: Mark 3:20-35

How many of you have served in a church leadership position? Church council?

Sunday School teacher? Worship assistant? Served on ministry teams or helped around the church?

In all your time of serving, would you have ever considered saying that Jesus is possessed by the power of evil? Of course not! Yet today's Gospel reading is a story of church leaders who did just that!

These leaders condemned Jesus' behavior by saying the devil had him – and furthermore, that Jesus was casting out demons (one of his many healing miracles) – in the name of the champion of evil!

....Church leaders – people that others depended on and trusted to teach and record the Word of God.....*condemned* Jesus!

How on earth would WE deal with a problem in our congregation like that?

Jesus' earthly family felt they had to deal with it by rescuing him from the presence of this situation and taking him home where he could be safe.

It is here – in this struggle between church leadership and family love that Jesus states – QUITE sternly – just what he came on earth to be and to show us.

This Jesus recorded for us in the Gospel of Mark quickly and continuously encounters confrontation with the world's authorities. This confrontation, more and more quickly, moves Jesus in a direct and fast line to death on a cross – the place – especially for this Gospel writer, Mark – where God most CLEARLY reveals the power of God's Kingdom.

The difficulties that Jesus encountered with religious authorities stemmed from his regular association with folks the world had named and claimed – with scriptural support – to be the lost, the sinful, the ANTI-GODLY ones of the world.

Jesus regularly associated with the misfits, the chronically ill and disabled, the poor (therefore, to the world, the Unblessed), the physically deformed, the “unusual,” and a host of others who were outcasts in society. This was *unthinkable* behavior to a devout Jew, and today Jesus condemns *them* for misunderstanding the reason God sent him to earth.

“If I am casting out demons in the name of a demon,” Jesus snaps, then how in the world could the kingdom of evil continue to exist? Can a kingdom cast out *itself*? If Satan has risen up against himself, this is the end of that kingdom. Why would worldly power seek to eliminate its own power?

When Jesus expounds this logic to his accusers, he then warns them of a most unforgiveable sin – that of calling the work of God’s Holy Spirit *EVIL*.....

As Jesus then hears that his family has come for him, Jesus challenges the very definition of *family* by telling this heightened crowd that the ones **THEY** have condemned are truly the family of God....and that only those who are interested in doing what God wills and the Spirit purposes are Jesus’ **TRUE** family....

What worldly authorities – even Jesus’ closest family – have considered “mad” – Jesus insists is the sign of God’s action that they have rejected.

This is one of the most troubling texts, I believe, for those of us who put high priority on family and the truth we have been taught throughout our lives. The warm and loving Jesus we prefer reminds us here that God will not support a theology of exclusion. Our judgments on

those who “look,” “sound,” or “act” differently than we are not Godly behavior. God sees through ALL of our outer appearances and looks into the heart of our faithfulness to Jesus’ mission. We are “family” – JESUS’ family – with so many that in today’s world would be *unimaginable* sidekicks. My youngest son, Justin, constantly reminds me that the world looks at his long, brushy and curly hair, his bearded chin, his “fishing hat,” and his general “redneck” look as an outer appearance that others reject. “But when they get to know me,” Justin says, “they realize what a great guy I am!”

Jesus sees what we cannot. And Jesus calls “family” those whose hearts are bent on doing God’s will – ignoring physical traits and focusing everything on loving God and loving others as we love ourselves.

Jesus raises the question to us today: “Who are my mother and my brothers?” “Who is ‘family’ here at my church in Point Township/Milton?”

“You will see me mingling with all those that might seem undesirable. You will see me casting out demons and silencing the power of evil here. You will hear me calling you to raise

up this house of God, standing tall and firm together against the power that seeks to condemn my true family.

“You will hear me call for silence when worldly authority chooses to condemn the very ones for which I came to live and die – and raise up to prove that death’s evil power is no more!”

We are the church leaders: the council members, the pastors, the teachers, the ministry responders, the ones who light the candles, unlock the doors, till the garden, and lift up the name of Jesus in this place.

So let’s go out again from this place – ready to grasp the family of Jesus Christ – those who are OUR family, too – with open arms and hearts.

We cannot stand divided. We cannot reject what Jesus has come to save.

And if we do? Mark reminds us again today: Jesus will *always* welcome them!

Amen.