

MARK 3:20-35

Genesis 3:8-15Palm 130

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Binding the Strongman

To recap ... first of all, the 'law experts' accuse Jesus of casting out demons with the power of the ruler of the all the demons, Beelzebul.

Jesus retorts, "Well, how stupid is that!". "The ruler of the demons is in favour of people having demons ... why would that demon ruler give me power to toss out demons? When demons are cast out, his entire world ends. Why would the demon ruler want to his power to end?"

Jesus continues, "However, if there was someone who wanted to eliminate the ruler's power they would have to enter that ruler's house and plunder it.

But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

"That's what I'm doing!" says Jesus

I have a few questions about this story of successful binding to plunder.

Who is this strong man that needs binding? What is the strong man's house? How does Jesus bind this strong man to plunder his house? And, as always, how can we 'do Jesus' in our lives today?

First of all, who is the strong man and where is his house?

To understand this we need to go back to our first scripture reading today. Our Genesis reading of the story of our eviction from the Garden of Eden. After all the blaming, we find that it was the serpent that convinced humanity to 'eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil', denying their God's offer of a perfect and carefree life. So, either God was not to be trusted, or perhaps what the serpent's appeal was stronger, more convincing, more desirous?

When Pat and I were in Mexico a few months ago, we went to visit the Aztec ruins at a place called Tulum. There I learned about the Aztec God of the of the earth and sky, that the Aztecs called Quetzalcoatl. A serpent with feathers. Serpent for 'God of the earth' and feathers for 'God of the sky'. Not evil, not a devil, but powerful for all things earthly. Ahhh ... not evil or a devil or Satan... as ancient icons go, just of things of the earth, things that humans need and that we love like food, and that we are frightened of like predators. So, my understanding of the serpent in the Garden of Eden had a new perspective. Perhaps instead of horrible devil perhaps it could be simply represent those things that we are connected to, attracted by, concerned about in our earthly human nature and existence. Our emotions, our senses, our fears, our anxiety. We get all attached and overwhelmed with our earthly nature when we do not put our trust in the Holy Spirit. Paul says for our healing, "we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen" (2 Corinthians 4:18)

So, the house of the tempter, the snake, the devil, Satan, demon is perhaps just our earthly existence that creates in us a nature that is in so many instances, opposed to the Kingdom of God. It needs subduing so that we, with that strong pull to our humanity, can be 'plundered' by TRUST in God. So that we can be bound up by the love of Jesus Christ and plundered by the overwhelming compassion of God.

Secondly, who binds the strong man in his own house? And how does this person bind the strong man?

God has been at work in this earthly realm for eons ... always sending amazing people to bind the strong man in his own house.

Pharoah, a strong man king, enslaved our ancestors and forced them into slavery in Egypt; the Lord raised up Moses to set God's people free to worship; Moses bound up Pharoah and plundered his house with the Holy spirit of God. The Philistines wreaked havoc on Israel in their very own backyard, but the Lord raised up a man named Samson to deliver Israel, Samson bound up the Philistines and plundered their house with the Holy Spirit of God. Goliath threatened God's people and mocked their God in the Valley of Elah, but the Lord sent a man named David to strike down the giant so the people of God could worship again; David bound the strong man Goliath and plundered his house with the Holy Spirit of God. King Nebuchadnezzar dragged God's people into captivity AGAIN, but the Lord sent a man named Daniel who endured trials, shut the mouths of lions and brought the king to his knees and to repentance. Daniel bound that strong man, Nebuchadnezzar and plundered his house in the name of God.

In all of these stories, those strong men who acted like that 'old serpent' of earthly power, were overcome by men who bound them up in the power of HOLY SPIRIT. Those stories were shadows of God for God's people ... shadows of that 'binder of evil strong men', that plunderer of houses. God sent our Jesus, God's Christ, God's incarnate right into the serpent's house. God sent Jesus with all his humanness and with all his Godliness to enter this earthly house, bind the strong man Satan/snake/devil, and plunder this earthly house.

Yes, God sent Jesus ... like God sent Moses, Samson, Daniel and David ... to enter the strong man's house to bind and overpower that strong man in his own home. But God sent Jesus to bind and overpower THE RULER of ALL the devils. God sent Jesus to bind the BIG BOSS responsible for the actions of the Pharoah, the Philistines, Goliath, and Nebuchadnezzar altogether. God sent Jesus to bind the one responsible for all the terrors of this earthly existence that take us from our trust in the only truth ... in God. God didn't just send Jesus, God came as Jesus to bind evil for all time! Praise God for Jesus the Christ.

What does Jesus do that bind that strong man so that he can plunder his house?

Jesus, in our reading today, is casting out demons. Jesus is bringing the Kingdom of God right into the house of the serpent/devil/Satan, this earthly power. Jesus heals, Jesus heals on the Sabbath, Jesus eats with outsiders, Jesus loves the outcasts, Jesus loves the enemy, Jesus trusts his entire human life to God. Jesus does everything to bring people together, to give people a sense of worthiness. Jesus loves. Jesus loves like God loves entirely and completely and forever. Jesus unbinds humanity from greed, anxiety, hatred and fear.

Jesus places the worship of God back in the first order, no matter what. Jesus loves with the worship of God through attacks on his integrity, through lack of understanding of his mission, through accusations of devil-worship, through persecution, and even through death.

PAUSE

God is in full command of that which is GOOD. The BAD is only our worship of the things of this earth ... things of Quetzalcoatl ... not evil, but not GOD. If we are not in God, we are in a house divided. We need to be in God.

Jesus fully entered that house in his time, ... he was poor, he was overrun with Roman rule, he opposed the Pharisees (those who set the tone for the people of God), he didn't blame God for bringing bad things, but put the blame where it belongs, squarely on the lived world. Basically he trivialized the things that people thought, at the time, were so important and proceeded to honour people, all people, friend or enemy, and place no blame.

Pause

How do WE, living in the strong man's house, follow the way of Jesus and plunder that house for God? Our scripture gives us three things to focus on. Not 'laws', but worldviews, all focussing on the world of the Kingdom of God.

First of all, it's all about love and only about love. Jesus isn't exhibiting just a feeling love. Jesus is all about acting on love. We are asked to trust that whatever is happening God is in charge if we surrender to the power of God. For example, how do we act when we are afraid? If we surrender we might be able to resist the instinct to sniping, or hoarding, or belittling, lashing out ... very earthly and human response of fear. How do we act when we are angry? With trust in God, we are able to bring peace to every situation, to examine the troubles of 'the other' instead of rage or revenge. If we surrender to God, we will be cared for.

Secondly, we are told, that the unforgiveable sin is to blame God for our difficulties. So, let's not blame at all. Our Genesis scripture told us clearly where Adam and Eve went when they were in trouble. They went to blame... a lot! Adam blamed God for his shame; then when questioned about eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam blamed Eve; then Eve blamed the serpent. From this story, it's probable that, like shame, blaming is pretty inherent in our earthly selves. Direct from Jesus (Mark 3:29)" but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin." Basically, as long as we are blaming God, or anybody, for that matter, for our troubles, we are missing the point of our earthly difficulties and missing the opportunity to trust in God's eternal presence in our coping with those difficulties. Let's stop looking for 'fault' because there is no 'fault', just living human from a earthly perspective.

Last of all, we can acknowledge this amazing huge family that God has created. This stance alone placed Jesus in a very precarious situation. In the first century, binding to family was just a little lower than love of God. However, in asking, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" and declaring that, not his blood relatives, but those that were his disciples were his family, Jesus didn't necessarily diminish his love of family. We are reminded that what Jesus did that was so wonderful, in relation to his acceptance and love of all people as if family, with a quote from St. Symeon, "for Jesus, it didn't matter whether he saw his own mother or a prostitute, the joy of those gathered at a wedding or the sorrow of those gathered at the burial of a loved one. It didn't matter whether he saw his disciples or his executioners, or a bird or a tree—Jesus saw God in all that he saw." Jesus did not exclude any for mistrust, or anger or sorrow, but included all in love.

We as the church of Christ are obliged to intentionally be inclusive; intentionally seeking those of race, ethnicity and social class that may be different from our member roll, bringing together people from different places in life, promoting the well-being of all.

As participants in active love, we, as the church, are directed to work toward the well-being of the larger world, taking a stand against racism, sexism, economic exploitation, poverty, and war. How can we, so small, make an impact on these huge problems? How can we stop wars? Perhaps we can gather our courage and listen carefully to people who have been in a war, hearing their pain. In listening carefully to their pain, perhaps we are lucky enough to cry with them and pray with them for peace. We, as the church of Christ

today, are directed to demand the presence of the Kingdom of God's House where there is inclusivity egalitarianism, justice, abundance and peace. We may find that tears are necessary to help us understand and include the other.

In the House of the Kingdom of God, the strong man is bound tightly, with assurance. In the House of the Kingdom of God, we are free. We just have to learn to trust that, and together, we can remind each other as we journey in this family of believers to trust in the grace of God.

AMEN

Our hymn in response is number 471 ... We are one in the spirit.