

## BINDING THE DEVIL

Mark 3:20-35

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

June 10, 2018

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Third Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 3, verses 20 through 35. It is on page 709 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, we learn of Jesus' power over the powers of this world. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 3, beginning at verse 20, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>20</sup> Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat.

<sup>21</sup> And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

<sup>22</sup> And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." <sup>23</sup> And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. <sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" —<sup>30</sup> for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

<sup>31</sup> And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." <sup>33</sup> And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" <sup>34</sup> And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Dear saints, you and I have an enemy. And perhaps I shouldn't just say, "Dear saints," here, but, "Dear people." Whether you are a believer or not, we all share a common enemy.

Our enemy is strong too. He is stronger than we are. To be completely truthful, he is stronger than you or I can handle.

Our enemy is the devil—also known as Satan, the accuser, the slanderer, the ancient serpent, or as in our text this morning, Beelzebul and "the prince of demons."

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He is our enemy, and we should not underestimate him. He is strong. He is stronger than any of us can handle. If anybody could handle him, we might have thought our first parents—Adam and Eve—could. But, as we heard in the Old Testament lesson, even they could not. Even in their perfect innocence before the fall into sin, they could not withstand his temptation.

He tempted them to sin, they gave in, and the human race was corrupted. The serpent proved his mastery over the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve.

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We don't hear a lot about the devil these days, and I think the devil is okay with that. We almost treat him as some sort of mythological figure, like Zeus or Thor. But let's be clear. The devil is real. And he is strong too. His strength lies in his deception. He loves lies.

The devil is content to let you believe whatever you want, as long as you do not believe in Jesus—as long as you do not believe the Truth.

There is only one Truth, but the number of lies is practically infinite. And the devil likes them all, because he is the father of lies (John 8:44). The devil actually invented lying. If it were not for him, the thought never would have crossed our minds to say something that isn't completely truthful.

Whatever the lie may be, the devil likes it. And he is the ultimate pragmatist. Whatever lie works, he loves it.

The devil even loves the lie that he is merely a myth. An old French poet said this—and I think there is some truth to it—"The loveliest trick of the devil is to persuade you that he does not exist" (Charles Baudelaire, "The Generous Gambler"). I think I've shared that quote with you before. And he's not quite right, but he's close. The devil's greatest trick is to convince us that evil is good and good is evil, but the old French guy had a point. The devil is very happy when we don't believe he is real. He likes every lie. The devil is content to allow the "enlightened western mind" to believe he is not real.

If a man breaks into your house to rob you, and if he can keep you under the delusion that he is not really there, then he can do whatever he wants.

And this—I think—has been the devil's strategy in modern ages. In an age where people are skeptical of anything supernatural, the devil is content to allow that skepticism to remain. Why terrorize people, when that terror may cause them to seek the One True God.

The devil will allow you to believe whatever you want, as long as it is a lie. If you want to believe the devil is the master of this world, he is obviously happy with that. If you want to believe the devil does not exist, he is content to let you believe that too, because that may be his best chance to prove it to you when it counts. Even if you want to believe the devil is a wimp, and you are stronger than him, the devil is more than happy to let you think that too, because that belief will take your eyes off of Jesus and onto yourself. Then the devil will prove his power to you when it counts.

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In the gospel lesson, there are some people who believe a lie that the devil must have been quite happy with. They actually believe that Jesus is casting out demons by the power of Satan—Beelzebul.

They believe this lie because they are unwilling to accept the alternative. They are unwilling to accept Jesus' claim that he does these things by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Like most critics, they would prefer to reject the reality of Jesus' miracles. But the evidence is right before their eyes. They cannot deny it. They are forced to accept the presence of supernatural power. But they do not like this supernatural power, so they put a demonic spin on it.

And there's some apologetic significance to this. Apologetics, by the way, has to do with the defense of the faith. When our faith comes under attack we stand up for it. It's not that we argue people into the Kingdom of God, but when the historicity of our faith is called into question, like it often is today, it is appropriate for Christians to give a defense. So we want to pay attention to the historical details that confirm the historicity of our faith, and this is one of many. Today's skeptic would simply say that Jesus' signs and wonders are legends—that they never actually happened. This is the easiest argument to make when none of us were actually there. But the skeptics in Jesus' day didn't have that luxury. The evidence was right before them. Instead of just dismissing the claim that Jesus healed diseases and casted out demons, they had to come up with a different explanation. They had to come up with an explanation that could account for the fact that these things actually happened. And the best explanation they could come up with—as sorry as it was—is that Jesus did these things by the power of the devil. And this is significant for us. Jesus critics couldn't just write him off. They had to deal with the evidence that was right in front of their faces.

So they chose the devil's lie rather than the truth. From the very beginning, the devil has been convincing the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve to believe his lies. He is crafty. He is the master of deception.

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We should not underestimate the devil. In this little parable Jesus tells, he calls the devil "the strong man" (3:27). Even Jesus admits that the devil is strong. But we should also not overestimate the devil. He may be "the strong man." But he is not "the stronger man."

Here's the little parable Jesus tells: **"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."** (3:27).

In this parable the devil is the strong man, and Jesus is the thief who comes to plunder him. It seems kind of odd, because Jesus admits the devil is strong, and he uses a thief as an illustration for himself. Now stealing, of course, is wrong, and this is where the analogy breaks down. So remember, it's just a parable, and every analogy breaks down at some point; otherwise it wouldn't be an analogy, but the thing itself. So we only take the analogy as far as it's intended. Jesus isn't breaking into the devil's house to plunder what legitimately belongs to the devil. He plunders the house in order to take back what the devil had stolen. All things in heaven and on earth were created through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:16), so the devil's mastery over the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve is illegitimate. Jesus is the rightful master, so he breaks into the devil's house, ties him up, and takes back what is rightfully his.

So to us, the devil is the strong man. He is stronger than us, so we should not underestimate him. But he is not "the stronger man." Jesus is the stronger man. So we should also not overestimate the devil. He is stronger than us, but he is not stronger than our Savior.

By casting out demons, Jesus demonstrated that he is the stronger man. He is the One who came to plunder the devil. Jesus attacked the devil and overcame him. Jesus took away the devil's armor and divided his spoil. Jesus is the One to drive the devil and his demons out of this

world. Jesus is the One who came to free the captives (Eph. 4:8; Ps. 68:18). And he does this by his death on the cross.

Now this seems like an odd way to plunder the devil's house. If Jesus is really stronger than the devil—and he is—why not just beat him up and take what you want? Here's the thing: The greatest weapons the devil has against us are our own sin and the accusation of the Law. The devil uses God's Law—which is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7:12)—the devil uses it against us. And he's actually right. We are guilty, and we do deserve condemnation. If we were innocent in this whole mess Jesus would be right to just beat up the devil and take us back. But we are not innocent; we sold ourselves to the devil. So Jesus plunders Satan by allowing himself to be bound to the cross and have our sins laid upon him. This, actually, is not the binding of Jesus, but the binding of Satan, because it takes away Satan's ability to accuse. And having bound Satan, Jesus has free reign to come and take back what Satan had stolen from him.

This victory was accomplished at the cross, and the signs and wonders leading up to it gave a foretaste of his ultimate authority. So Jesus demonstrates this power by casting out demons. And this also demonstrates that the Kingdom of God has come. The reign of Satan has come to an end, and the reign of Christ has come and continues to come through the preaching of the Gospel, which is the declaration that God graciously forgives sins on account of Christ.

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And this is what we pray for, when we pray, "Thy kingdom come." We pray for something that we know has already come, but Jesus taught us to pray it anyway.

The Catechism teaches us,

The kingdom of God comes indeed of itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come also to us.

How is this done?

When our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and live a godly life here on earth and in heaven forever.

God's Kingdom has already come, so when we pray for it to come, we are asking for it to come personally to our hearts and lives. We pray for Jesus to come to us with the same power he used to cast out demons. And he does. He comes through the Word—the Gospel—which "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). The Gospel has the power to silence all the accusations of the Law, the devil, and your own conscience, because it declares to you that Jesus has already paid for those sins, and you are acquitted. You are declared innocent. The accusations of the Law, the devil, and your own conscience have no power over you.

Through the Word, Jesus comes to us with the power to forgive our sins and protect us from the evil one. So we have confidence to also pray, "Deliver us from evil."

We have confidence that God will answer these prayers, "For he himself has commanded us to pray in this manner and has promised to hear us." God has promised to hear and answer.

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Now when someone makes a promise to you, you naturally ask yourself two questions: *Is this person faithful? And, Is this person capable?*

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Jesus has proven that he is capable. He is powerful enough to keep his promises. He proved his power over the devil by casting out demons, and he proved his power over death by healing the sick, raising the dead, and finally rising from the grave himself. Jesus is most certainly capable. Jesus is the stronger man.

And he is faithful. He proved this to us on the cross. He was faithful unto death.

Jesus is the stronger man, and he is your Lord.

It was on the cross that Jesus defeated the devil and became your Lord. In what looked like defeat, Jesus was victorious. It was in the weakness of death that Jesus exercised his power over sin, death, and the devil.

At so many times in Jesus' life he looked weak. His strength was so often hidden in weakness. His little band of disciples did not look like much of an army. His Kingdom had no earthly palace. The power of God was hidden in weakness. When he stood on trial he didn't even make a defense. His strength was hidden in silence. And nowhere did Jesus look weaker than on the cross. In this—his greatest act of deliverance—he had nothing but a crown of thorns as he died naked and alone. But in this hideous event, that looked so very weak, Jesus was crushing the head of that ancient serpent (Gen. 3:15).

The death of God was really the death blow to the serpent.

The power of God was veiled in the death of one who "was numbered with the transgressors" (Is. 53:12). This moment, when the Son of God was so weak that he could not hold on to the breath of life any longer—this is the power of God. The cross is where the serpent struck our Savior's heel, but our Savior crushed his head (Gen. 3:15). It is on the cross that Jesus proves himself to be the stronger man. We have an enemy. He is strong. He is stronger than us. But he is not stronger than our Jesus. Jesus is the stronger man. Jesus is the one who bound the devil. Jesus is our Rescuer. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.