

Baptism and Holy Communion

June 10th. 2018.

Mark 3:20-35. And also 1 Samuel 8:4-end.

Following the verses we heard and just before our current gospel passage, we see different sorts of responses. There the excited response of the crowds - they gather around maybe in the house so they cannot even eat. There is the frightened response of demons. v11 Whenever evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out. You are the Son of God. There is the frightening response of the teachers of the law. They do not come with questions and doubts like Nicodemus did, no they come with dark accusation and accuse Jesus of getting his powers from Satan. And there is the worrying response of his family - they feel he is out of his mind, and they come not to stand alongside him or encourage him, but to take control, to get him to stop, to be silenced... ¹

CS Lewis said that when people consider Jesus life, teachings, the events around them, we are left with only three conclusions. Jesus was mad, bad or God. While his family feel he has gone out of his mind, the teachers of the law don't. They don't believe he is God, they declare he is bad.

Looking at this conversation briefly...

Jesus responds to their accusation with incredible grace doesn't he? I don't know how you would have responded if you were accused if your ministry and work for God was empowered by evil. It is here for the first time we see Jesus use a parable. A picture story, a point within, he wants them to think and to

¹ Garland, D. E. (1996). *Mark* (p. 134). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

understand, he doesn't reject them. He seeks in this case for them to see the logic and the lack of logic.

A kingdom cannot fight itself or it will collapse and defeat its purposes. Satan cannot defeat his own schemes. In the allegory. The Strong One is Satan. The house is his domain - the world he seeks to hold secure. The possessions are the people he has taken captive in different ways. The Strong one who comes - no debate about who is stronger - is Jesus -who comes from God, invades Satan stronghold and binds him.

Isaiah 49:24-25 says - ²⁴ Can plunder be taken from warriors, or captives be rescued from the fierce? ²⁵ But this is what the LORD says: 'Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and plunder retrieved from the fierce; I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save.

In Isaiah 49 we hear of how Yahweh will come to his people. He will contend for this people. He will take up their cause. He will act. He will set free the plunder, rescue the captives from the fierce.

In 1 Samuel 8 , God declares that Israel has rejected him his kingship. He now shares what an earthly kingdom will be like and do. For the Jewish people, the kingdom coming, included in its meaning, the defeat of Satan, evil and sin. Now Jesus says the Strong man is bound. Here as someone writes:

" we have Mark's clearest statement that Jesus' authority over the demons constitutes the inbreaking of God's reign, heralding and effecting the demise of Satan's dominion over humanity²"

The advent of the kingdom of God in Jesus, is more than traditions being challenged, theology being reshaped, healing taking place. The kingdom comes and battle is being waged against the kingdom of Satan which seeks to hold all humanity in slavery.³ As Samuel describes what the earthly kingdom will look like under kings of Israel, here Jesus describes what the kingdom of God looks like breaking in...

What this means. We are in a spiritual battle daily. We know we have our sinful nature, our flesh battling against our desires to follow and be faithful to Jesus. We are a walking civil war as we have said.

But we have an enemy who seeks to turn us away from Christ. Peter describes him as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour, (1 Peter 5:8-9). Jesus describes Satan's aims:

"⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10).

Paul when writing to the church in Ephesus, he reminds them of how they have blessed in the heavenly realms with every

² Watts, R. E. (2007). [Mark](#). In *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (p. 148). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.

³ Garland, D. E. (1996). [Mark](#) (p. 133). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

spiritual blessing in Christ. (Eph 1:3-4). But then goes on to say in chapter 6, to close his teachings on discipleship -

"Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood... Put on the full armour of God so that when the day of evil comes , you may be able to stand our ground...." (6:11-13).

When the day of evil Paul says, not if the day comes. And of course as we read in Letter of Revelation we see Satan subtle and not subtle ways to attack the Church and influence the world...

There is a strong man. God binds him. But while he has been defeated at the cross and resurrection, he is not destroyed. We are reminded we have an enemy seeking to attack us.

So in our baptism we reminded ourselves. In the liturgy we heard the question...

"Therefore I ask:

Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?

I reject them.

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

I renounce them.

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

I repent of them. "

Satan seeks to control all of this world. An enemy who seeks to steal kill and destroy within our lives, families, relationships and congregations and communities.

However Jesus says to the teachers of the law (in our gospel reading). The strong man is bound and his house is raided. When we read the previous verses (3:13-15) , Jesus calls the 12 to himself so that, we read, 'that would be with him and that he would send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons'. And Jesus now tells the teachers of the law - and his disciples and listen to this discussion - that following Jesus isn't only about standing, resisting (and the devil will flee), not only about resisting temptation. It is about invasion. It is about plundering the house of enemy so it becomes empty. You are invited to be a holy burglar. Jesus inaugurated the kingdom. He preached about it and demonstrated it. The kingdom continues to break in since his ascension. We look forward to and pray for the consummation of the kingdom. But in this inbetween time, we seek to be agents of the kingdom invading the enemies domain.

All of you have that commission, given at your baptism - as we have heard here today for Filip and have heard in the past for Benjamin, Sebastiaan, Saralynn, Tim and Sofia, Luke, Rachel and many more...

When you received the sign of the cross on your forehead, the cross you hold dear, the one you will seek to live by, you heard:

The minister says: Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified.

All reply saying to the baptism candidate: Fight valiantly as a disciple of Christ against sin, the world and the devil, and remain faithful to Christ to the end of your life.

That was your commission - to fight - I'd suggest not just to resist temptation but to be an agent of the kingdom of God, to invade to plunder to liberate.

What can this look like:

Luke 4 - Jesus has resisted the temptations of the devil in the wilderness. Then we read -

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me, to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

This is a definition, taken from Isaiah, of how Jesus saw his ministry - proclaiming and demonstrating the kingdom. And how that manifested we read in the gospel accounts. To invade Satan's house was much more than demons being cast out. And that is a manifesto for the church to be still about - for every baptised person to be about.

A final story that illustrates this, (*from Nicky Gumbel teachings on the Alpha Course*)...

In Hungary there is a lady called Ildika Papp. She was a homeless alcoholic. She was living out on the streets in a town near Budapest and somebody invited her on an Alpha Course, and on that course she gave her life to Christ and she experienced the love of Jesus. And she was set free from alcoholism. She got a job; she started life anew. 18 months later at an Alpha Training Conference she was interviewed and asked 'What difference has Jesus made to your life?' and this was her reply. She said, 'He's changed me from being a beggar to a princess.'

I say this beautiful story, not to point us first to being involved in the liberating and healing of those with addictions. Though I believe that should be the work of a church.

I share it because of what Jesus said - the strong man's possessions are carried off, he is robbed. Who are possessions? **People**, whose lives in different ways the enemy seeks to control, ruin, steal from. Reminds us that being agents of the kingdom, is about helping **people** come into that fullness of life Jesus promised, freeing them from the many ways Satan is stealing, destroying. It is about people who need us. To be holy burglars in the name of Christ, in his power and for the glory of the King.

Amen.