

**A House Divided Crashes Down! Mark 3:20-35** Rev. Brian Bagley-Bonner

I wonder if you noticed a cartoon in the Sunday Funnies two weeks ago.

Doonesbury, by Garry Trudeau, shows the Whitehouse announcing that the “sky is blue” as a test. In the final panel, The Senate Majority Leader is asked if the sky is blue and he responds, “I am not a meteorologist...” I think this captures the basic tone for our political, indeed all our cultural debates. Even if there is something uncontroversial, people will never agree with each other if they are not from the same political party or belief system. Why is this the case? Because instead of debating issues, we humans love to utilize character assassination as the verbal weapon of choice. So if you disagree with the President or the Pope or Rachel Maddow or Bill O'Reilly you have to challenge their morality and motivations and probably even their humanity as suspect.

Our gospel reading today shows us this is not new. Jesus, after traveling around doing the work of healing and inspiring has come home and a crowd gathers at the local Synagogue. Some tell his family that he has “gone out of his mind.” Some religious leaders say he is only able to heal because he is filled with a satanic spirit. This vilification of Jesus as either mentally ill or demonic would easily fit into today's debates. Even when Jesus is doing miraculous works of healing and inspiring those who are jealous of his power or just not understanding his message do not debate the merits of his words or actions, but instead attack his character.

But Jesus dismisses these attacks with the teaching, "A kingdom or even a house divided against itself will not stand." How silly, Jesus implies, to think an evil force would empower healing of the sick. It does not make sense. And Jesus warns against such judgementalism sternly declaring that calling a person doing the work of God demonic is blasphemy of the highest order with the most serious of consequences.

In some ways I wonder if there is a touch of irony in Jesus' sayings and parable in today's Gospel. After all, as we see from today's world, from our gospel, and really any analysis of history - Kingdoms of any size are always are divided. Every day in the paper we see the latest division in the Bradenton city government or Manatee County School Board.... Perhaps Jesus is reminding us that no human kingdom or nation, not the Roman empire, nor the Assyrian, nor the British Empire, not even our favorite city council lasts forever. Is Jesus suggesting by his parable that no human political entity will ever be undivided and thus able to be our refuge and strength?

And what about our houses – In that great phrase used by President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, Jesus says a House divided against itself cannot stand. I think Jesus uses the term "house" the way the prophets of the Old Testament did. When they used to call the people to faithfulness they called them “the House of Israel.” So our house could be a way to see our race, or our creed, our gender, even our church.. it's a way to say “our tribe” however we mean that... Rev. Talitha Arnold Senior Minister of the United Church of Santa Fe wrote a devotional this week (see our Facebook page to see a new one daily) where she described who Christians have accused of being the "Antichrist" in history. She reminded us that we have “slapped (that label) on people of other faiths (Jews, Muslims, etc.) or other Christians with whom we disagree. Protestant Reformers John Wycliffe and Jan Hus both labeled the Pope the Antichrist, and the Pope returned the favor.” Is Jesus suggesting that our house– even our house of faith – is a human institution, that will always be divided?

And how ironic that Jesus' nuclear family, his mother, brothers all come to “fetch him out” of the synagogue where he is embarrassing them in front of the home town crowd. And yet he does not engage them. He is not worried about them as he teaches. Is Jesus suggesting that even the important and sacred institution of family is not a solid rock upon which to stand. That it too can be divided? I have to share with

And so we gather now in that place. At this table all are welcome. This is the family table of the parents and siblings of Jesus himself. Come and eat and drink. No litmus test here. No signing of certain beliefs. You are just invited to let God lift you up and you will find release from the need to judge others. Let us put down our ego-minds and drink in the freedom of being God's children. Celebrating God's Freeing power at the Passover feast. Jesus took the bread, and after giving thanks, cup and after giving thanks, Baruch ata Adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam hamotzi lechem min ha'arets. broke the bread and said "this is my body broken for you." Then after supper he took the Elijah cup - again gave thanks - Baruch ata Adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam borei peri hagafen. and said, "take drink, this signifies the promise of God's love no matter what happens." Come children, the feast of love and life is here for you.

Mark 3:20-35 and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 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. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 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.

"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

you that in all my years of ministry and chaplaincy, I have yet to find a family with no division, no tension, no struggle. No family is perfect and at total peace.

So is there any hope? Any possibility that we can find a place of peace, of no division and stress and conflict? I think so, and Jesus shows us when he looks at the people gathered there and says, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." And what is the will of God? Jesus has just shown us that it's not about judging others, but looking over friends and strangers and saying, "here is my family." The religion of Jesus is about expanding the family, the tribe, the kingdom, the realm of God. Welcoming the outcast and the stranger is the core of our faith. And so right away Samaritans are welcomed, then Gentiles – even Roman Soldiers by Jesus himself. And so realm of God continues to expand in our history, through the abolitionist movement - where we say God wants to captive free and recognized as fully God's child. It is continued in the fight for women's right to vote, Civil Rights, the affirming of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people, The welcoming of those who are differently able and our striving for greater consciousness of including those suffering from mental illness... The will of God is to gather all the lost sheep into the household. And it is our job to welcome them.

Jesus assures us that we don't have to judge any more. At our core we know we do it in order to make ourselves feel better or more important. But Jesus tells us that we are already a part of God's family and loved for who we are. There is one place of no division and that is smack dab in the love of God and the Peace of Jesus the Christ.