

BEING DIVIDED AGAINST YOURSELF

(Mark 3:20-35)

The gospel of Mark happens to be the book of scripture we are studying in our Thursday morning Bible study; a study attended mostly by members of our wider community who find themselves in a situation of immediate need, and who find their way to our church on Thursday mornings in hopes of being able to get access to food, or gasoline, or shelter, or help with rent or utilities, or a cup of coffee, or breakfast, or information, or a prayer . . . Your generous donations to the Pastor's Emergency Fund make that access real for many people, and on their behalf, the pastoral staff extends deep gratitude to you this morning.

Even though in our Thursday morning system people are generally limited to help from us once per month, slowly but surely, more and more, people are coming on Thursdays not *just* for the material help we can provide, but *also* for the Bible study! As the love of God through

the actions and teachings of Jesus is made more and more plain to many people who previously had only been taught that God was against *who they were* and *what they do*, it is a joy to watch people make the connections between the context in which Jesus lived and did his ministry, and the context in which we live and do our ministry in Jesus's name today.

One connection between the past and the present that is easily made by the Thursday morning crowd is that when someone or someplace is said to have some healing that has some empirical evidence of working, people are going to flock to it! And Mark's gospel narrative—even up to where we are studying it this morning in the 3rd chapter—is FULL of healing! In just the first three chapters, Jesus publicly heals a man in the synagogue with an unclean spirit; Peter's mother-in-law; a leper; a paralytic; a man with a withered hand; and innumerable others who were brought to him by those who heard that he could heal. It feels similar to what has happened with the hip and knee replacement

industry. The empirical evidence is that it helps most people who try it feel a whole lot better, so the waiting list keeps getting longer and longer with those who are flocking to it and seeking that healing.

So it is not unusual that we find Jesus this morning surrounded by a huge crowd of people—because that man named Jesus could heal! But it is a bit unusual that we find Jesus at his family home, out in his family yard, surrounded by this huge crowd of people! Mark makes the point that there were so many people, and so much commotion going on in the yard, that Jesus and his disciples were not even able to eat!

However, if they were trying to eat in the midst of a huge crowd of hungry people, that could explain some of the commotion . . .

It finally got to be such a distraction for Jesus's mother and siblings—who were *inside* the house—that they came *out* and tried to bring Jesus *in*, because, as quiet as it is usually kept in gospel circles, Jesus's family thought that he was “cra-cra”; crazy with a capital Z! They didn't quite understand him OR his ministry yet, so they were trying to keep him

from embarrassing the family name! So now he's got a whole bunch of people out in the yard, and he's saying and doing the kinds of things that could only get him in trouble with the authorities—something that his family DID NOT want, neither for Jesus nor for themselves.

But—speaking of the authorities—the next people mentioned in this story are the religious legal scholars, who we generally refer to as “scribes”, that have traveled all the way from Jerusalem and who show up in Jesus's yard, accusing him of doing magic (something that could be punished if proven), so it was necessary that they depose Jesus regarding these charges. To be clear, Jesus was accused of being in collusion with the ruler of the demons—who went by many names, including the name Beelzebul—and by the power and sponsorship of that collusion is said to be able to cast out demons.

In other words, Jesus was being accused of *being divided against himself*.

In response, Jesus gives an analogy that would seem to make being “divided against yourself” a tautology; a non-sequitur; something that would not make sense; something that would be against one’s own self-interest.

Jesus says *“If Satan casts out Satan, then Satan’s end has come. And if a kingdom or a house is divided against itself, neither that kingdom NOR that house would be able to stand.”*

II.

Those words and images from Jesus have played with the sanctified part of my social imagination over the past couple of weeks, particularly as I have witnessed and wrestled with the continuing effects of nationalism, government-sanctioned discrimination, racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, religious prejudice and hatred, hostility toward other cultures, and national divisions, that are not only a part of our daily news cycle, but which we are literally participating in on a daily basis—even and especially if we are not doing anything to help

stop them. Jesus was against the unequal treatment of people that sought to obliterate the belief that each human being is made in the image of God, and therefore is to be respected and treated as an equal child of God. And one of the times when Jesus forgot that, and directed racist and nationalist words and actions against a Phoenician woman who only asked for healing for her daughter, Jesus was willing to be set straight, and to accept correction from the woman, and to give her what she asked for.

In order for Jesus to be able to accept correction from the Phoenician woman; in order for Jesus to be willing to be set straight; in order for Jesus to repent, to change his words and actions, and to do something different, Jesus had to become *divided against himself*. Jesus had to *turn on himself*. Jesus had to *cast himself out*. Jesus had to allow a part of himself, and his thinking, and his action, *to crumble; to not stand anymore; to come to an end*.

It's literally the same thing WE have to do when we successfully participate in our own repentance. Because, lest we forget, it's not different WORDS that make for authentic repentance; it is different ACTION that makes for authenticity in repentance. We have to become like a house that is divided against itself, so that the un-hospitable, unloving, self-centered part of that house will not be able to stand. And with the crumbling and destruction of that which is divided, newness begins to take its place. A new thing begins to rise from the ashes. A new thing that includes more expansive boundaries for God's people to gather together, and more authentic possibilities for us all. Because it seems to me, that we can't use the same blueprint to get us OUT of a mess that we used to get INTO the mess.

- ✚ We can't use the blueprint of white supremacy and colonialism to get us out of the mess of institutional racism;

- ✚ We can't use the blueprint of patriarchy to get us out of the mess of sexism, and a culture of misogyny;

- ✚ We can't use the blueprint of "discrimination disguised as religious freedom" to get us out of the mess of heterosexism;
- ✚ We can't use the blueprint of nationalism and hatred of other cultures to get us out of the mess we have made of immigration.
- ✚ And we certainly can't use the blueprint of the current occupant of the White House to get us out of the mess we have made of truth and sanity.

In order for real transformation to come;

In order for real change to take place;

In order for authentic repentance to flow;

We have to become divided against the parts of ourselves that are leading us down the roads of communal destruction and despair, and let those houses fall.

We have to turn on ourselves—right where our "isms" are, right where our resistance to giving up our privilege is strongest, right where those parts of us are that we don't want to talk about, that we want to keep

hidden and safe and protected and left alone, that we wouldn't know what to do without, and that we feel we shouldn't have to share with anyone.

Instead of living in a whole house of injustice, we are called today to consider living in a house that is pushing against itself to move itself toward transformation, until what is resisting that transformation is no longer able to stand

To cast out what is keeping us from living in a world based on the values of God's kingdom.

To be divided against itself until its end has come.

And to let itself fall

Amen.