

Third Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel, Year B

A NATION DIVIDED

Mark 3:20-35

Third Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Peter Keyel

The crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21 When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." 22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." 23 And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27 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.

28 "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— 30 for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." 33 And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" 34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35

Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

DIAGNOSIS: Fractured by Upholding the Law

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Crazy Cast-out

Jesus was doing something different than the religious scribes. His teachings and casting out of demons was something new that the religious elite had not previously seen. Nor did Jesus always agree with the ruling elite. He was a threat to their power. Is it surprising that they moved to neutralize that threat by claiming he “has Beelzebul,” “has gone out of his mind,” or “he has an unclean spirit”? The establishment spreads plenty of fake news about Jesus to discredit him.

Is it any different today? Discrediting people, especially by claiming they are “erratic,” “chaotic,” have mental health problems, etc., is still a tried-and-true method to sow distrust and undermine opponents. We are quick to point out the failings when it is someone on our side being attacked, but we turn a blind eye to the charges against our own. Especially in America in 2018, there are certain circles where you can’t admit that you voted for Trump or for Clinton without being considered crazy. How could you have voted for that person?!

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): A Kingdom Divided

Jesus looks through the divisions and sees what the scribes are up to. They are about sowing division, and Jesus will not have it. If both they and Jesus are called to serve God, there is nothing to be gained by attacking each other. And to suggest that Jesus is at cross purposes with God, serving Satan, is ludicrous. How could Jesus, who is bringing healing, be on Satan’s side? As Jesus points out, any kingdom that is divided against itself will not last long. Even Satan is not that foolish.

That's bad news for us: American society is so divided that it will not last. Of course, we think, it's those crazy people forcing the divisions. It's the far-left, the alt-right, deep state ... always someone else. They're opposed to America, and if they just adopted our solution, everything would work out. We have to stand up to them, because we as a society cannot tolerate that kind of evil. It's on us to call out and fight the evil. Of course, that just continues to feed the division with no solution short of our total victory.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Blaspheming the Holy Spirit

The real problem with divisions in God's house is that division blasphemes the Holy Spirit, which is war on God. This sin has eternal consequences because we are waging war on the eternal. And when it's us against God, who do you think will win?

Prognosis: Bound Together as Family by the Gospel

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Receiving the Holy Spirit

God does something completely unexpected in our war against God. Instead of destroying those who oppose God and bring divisions into God's Kingdom, God comes into the world as Jesus to reconcile the world to him. Jesus carries out this mission through death on the cross, asking mercy for those who carry unforgivable sins. God grants this mercy through Jesus' resurrection and freely promises reconciliation to all.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Satan's Kingdom Divided

Jesus' mission of reconciliation has one clear effect, to which he alludes in this parable: by reconciling sinners to God, Satan's kingdom plundered. It can no longer stand up. Satan's end has come. We are no longer divided against each other, but

instead we now see the love and mercy that God bears to all people. Now the division is between the old Satanic ways—that still try to hold onto us, and Christ's new way of mercy that promises to hold us.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Family

The unification of God's kingdom and fracturing of Satan's kingdom leads to a new calculus regarding divisions. One image for this is Jesus' family: Faith frees us to live together as family. No longer do we need to see others as threats to us or as enemies to be discredited. We are freed to listen to the other and work with them to constructively solve problems, confident that we share Christ's mercy.