

The Second Sunday After Trinity, 9 June 2024, Year B:
Mark 3.19 - end

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. (Psalm 19.14)

'Previously in' Mark's gospel meaning last Sunday we heard Jesus say that I, the son of man, am Lord of the Sabbath. We also saw him act on this by healing a man with a withered hand also on the Sabbath closely watched by the Pharisees reminding us that if it is in our power, acts of mercy are always Now or have a 'Now dimension' to them. If we see something is amiss we are to act. We are to speak into a situation. We are to speak up. We are to speak out. To do so is always costly.

'Previously in' returning to the phrasing used at the beginning of the sermon commonly used to introduce an episode of a TV series to remind the viewer of what they have seen in earlier episodes is misleading, because we have missed out two episodes in Mark's gospel to arrive at today's gospel. The scenes missing are first Jesus ministering to seemingly hundreds possibly thousands of people at the lakeside of the Sea of Galilee who have heard of what he is doing from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. As he ministers he also casts out demons meaning he brings healing. He brings wholeness. To be possessed is literally to be beside yourself. The second episode missed out is the appointment of the twelve disciples who will come to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, The New Israel that Jesus' dynamic ministry ushers in. As Isaiah prophesies,

'See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.' (Isaiah 43:19)

The twelve will form the nucleus of those who will take Jesus' ministry forward. Doing so not in their own power, but in the power of his name and the Holy Spirit. Accordingly with last Sunday's gospel we have six episodes or staying with the image of a TV series three double episodes of approximately equal length implying the need for equal attention.

1. Pronouncement about the Sabbath
2. The Man with a Withered Hand
3. A Multitude at the Lakeside
4. Jesus Appoints the Twelve

5. Jesus and Beelzebul
6. The True Family of Jesus

The scene is set having noted last Sunday that Jesus' ministry has caught the attention of some Pharisees. Their encounter with him leads them to plot to do away with him. Recall also that last week we were still only in chapter two of Mark's gospel. Another group that is disturbed by Jesus' actions are his family especially his mother and brothers. They by a twist in the narrative also consider Jesus to be beside himself wanting to take him away with them. What has gotten into my son! What has gotten into our brother! We must rescue him from himself.

The family rescue mission is interrupted, because another set of people seek him out, scribes from Jerusalem. They have not come to rescue him. They have come to condemn him in front of the crowds. Have they come because of the reports of the Pharisees? The Pharisees who conspire to kill him. The scribes from Jerusalem, learned men versed in the Hebrew Scriptures, familiar with the worship of the Temple and keepers of the times and season of the Hebrew year come to Jesus saying, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' The scribes like his family proclaim he is possessed.

The claim the scribes make is the power Jesus has is from Beelzebub. There is nothing in the narrative to suggest this unless to forgive sins (the healing of paralytic with the pronouncement of sins), violating the Sabbath to still hunger (they pluck heads of corn because they were hungry), healing a man with withered hand on the Sabbath returning him to health in a society dependent on manual labour and healing hundreds possibly thousands is considered to be possessed. There is perversion in what both the scribes say and how the family react to Jesus' acts of mercy. Can't they see with the crowds the obvious? Recall what Nicodemus says to Jesus early in Jerusalem on in John's gospel, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." (John 3:2)

Pause. Some of you will have read in school and others for themselves a classic of 20th century English literature *The Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding, which is what Beelzebul means. Its etymological origin is even more debased deriving initially from the word dung around which flies swarm. Beelzebul represents all that is contrary to God's

goodness and our vocation as Christians. Beelzebul is the opposing force or forces if you like. With the rise of sorcery, the calling on other gods today and our susceptibility to a plethora of ideas, outrages and grievances as well as fake news (lying and deception) in a time where all previously observed boundaries no longer hold, Beelzebul whom Jesus binds is on the loose.

Jesus' response to the charges he is possessed by *The Lord of the Flies* is to invite those who have heard about him in Jerusalem, the scribes, to a meeting in a house where he speaks to them in parables. He is not afraid of them. He is generous inasmuch as he affords the scribes an opportunity to hear him for themselves. What remains of Jesus' teaching on that day is that he who supposedly is an instrument of Beelzebub has bound Beelzebub. In Orthodox icons, frescoes and mosaics you will see the majestic risen Christ striding over Hades whilst lifting up Adam and Eve (giving them a hand) having broken their chains, but Satan is bound meaning evil, those things contrary to God have no dominion over us. They are bound by the power of Christ. Therefore we sang on Trinity Sunday, 'I bind unto myself the strong name of the Trinity'. A Celtic Christian would know of what I speak.

Now we must tackle, having all the above in mind one of the most difficult passages in the Bible and there are a few. Jesus' ministry in Mark begins with the pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins when he not only heals the paralytic, but also forgives him his sins saying,

'Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Stand up and take your mat and walk"?' But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the paralytic— 'I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.' (Mark 2:9)

The implication is it is easier to say 'stand up, take your mat and go to your home!'

We have been taught and firmly believe that Jesus came to forgive sin. That sin and death have no more dominion over us. That he Jesus can and will forgive us all our sins. And that when we turn to him with a sincere heart we shall be forgiven our sin. Through Him we are reconciled to God and being united to God as Paul writes beautifully and powerfully, 'I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor

things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 8.38-39)

How are we to understand the pronouncement that the sin of blasphemy committed against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven. Why does Jesus say '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'. (Mark 3:28-29) It requires an explanation and the explanation given by Mark is because the Scribes and others claim, 'He has an unclean spirit'. He is possessed. The crowds don't have the same estimate. They don't come to him either to take him or to accuse him. They come because yes Jesus is possessed. He is possessed of the Power from High that is of Him.

The most straightforward answer I can offer is that the scribes give Beelzebul credit for what is clearly the work of God. This work they falsely ascribe to Beelzebul is the work of the Holy Spirit working in Him, through Him and of Him. A God who is merciful and just. Why is that they who are versed in the Scriptures, the worship of the Temple, the keepers of the times and seasons cannot perceive that the works Jesus is performing are of God. Why have they hardened their hearts? The people as we heard are not coming because in Mark's telling because of his teaching but because of his actions.

Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, 'You are the Son of God!' And yet we have Jesus being accused of having an unclean Spirit. When something is of God we must never turn it into what it is not. (Mark 3.11-12)

The reaction to God's work in Mark's Jesus he must be possessed. What are we to do with Him? We silence him. We take him away. We shut him up. We call him names. Beelzebul. We use his name in vain. He who brings goodness has no power over me! Jesus comes forgiving sins, healing, showing acts of mercy and because he meets people in their need by power of the Holy Spirit he is to be taken away. He is to be locked up. He is to be condemned. Not only he is to be condemned so are the works he is performing. His sphere of influence is to be curtailed. We don't want too much God. Thank you very much. Sound familiar?

The sin against the Holy Spirit is the perversion of knowingly and deliberately turning what is of God into what it is not. Straightforward examples are what is good is termed bad. What is virtuous is evil. What is of God is the work of Beelzebul. Jesus here is pointing out the severity of the sin being committed. Be mindful he is talking as he says to in parables. You can commit many sins, but the greatest sin is to deny that God is working in the world, working in the Body of Christ in you and me. Those who are truly his mother, sisters and brothers are those who acknowledge that the acts of power he performs are acts of loving mercy for freedom are of God and do his will. Jesus is of God. His ministry is of God.

Amen.

The ministry I have been entrusted with by the Church meaning amongst others you with its words giving life, health and assurance can seem like a whole bunch of words hollow, formulaic, unless they are pronounced in Jesus' name with faith in the power of the Spirit. I have no power to heal and to forgive or to assure the dying of their final passage into the hands of all loving and merciful God, unless it is in His name and according to the portion of faith I have been aided by the Holy Spirit