

Mark 3:20-35
2nd Sunday of Pentecost/Year B/June 6, 2021

Why **not** a season of Pentecost? To create this liturgical season is not a decision that can be made by a single church or denomination. However, for me, it is a season whose time has come. A season to reflect on the spiritual --- gifts given to each person; the fruits of the Spirit that are the harvest of living as people of God; and the powerful bond of the Holy Spirit that unites us. So, when we are together over the next few weeks, we will focus on the work of the Holy Spirit as seen in selected passages of scripture – seeking inspiration from that same Spirit as the word is read and proclaimed, and this morning asking for guidance from the Spirit in what it means to live as spiritual beings that are united as family – brothers and sisters in Jesus - joined across all boundaries by one thing – we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a people who do the will of God (Mark 3:34-35).

To set the stage for this morning’s gospel selection, we recall the fame of Jesus was spreading as he taught with authority; cured those who were sick with fevers, leprosy, withered hands, or were paralyzed. Jesus also healed those who were possessed by demons, rebuking and casting out the unclean spirits, as well as forgiving sin. The crowds following Jesus were huge and constantly present. People from every quarter (Mark 1:45) came to him to hear, see, touch, be made whole by Jesus. The demand on Jesus was so great; the possibility of his being injured by the crowds was real. So, Jesus was returning home after leaving the multitude at the seaside, but before, Jesus went up the mountain where he appointed the 12 “to be with him, to be sent out to proclaim the message, **and** to have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3:13-15).

Listen now for a word from God for your life as I read Mark 3:20-35. I will be reading from the NRSV.

Then he went home;²⁰ and 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. “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.” 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.”

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

A season of Pentecost, a time for us to consider - the movement and flow of the Holy Spirit to blow where it desires in each life – the fire of the Holy Spirit to transform each life over and over again. The Holy Spirit from the gospel reading this morning,

- that unites rather than divides,
- that gives us strength, and
- that has creative capacity, as found in our kinship with Jesus to be people who do the will of God.

As the narrative begins, Jesus has just returned home from the mountain, where we are reminded of the 12 apostles he named – a new type of spiritual family that **was**, as Jesus’ closest associates, called and appointed to work alongside Jesus in the doing God’s bidding in the establishment of the kingdom.

However, as Jesus returned to his home, he discovered once again the crowd was large, and the demand on him was so great, Jesus couldn’t get inside to sit, relax, or eat. We don’t know how long he had been without food, but lack of food and water can have a negative emotional effect on a person. Perhaps momentarily, Jesus, who was **so** hungry and **so** tired from the constant demands on him, got a little out of control. And when his family tried to help by calming Jesus, it seemed the scribes, also in the crowd, who feared and did not understand him, saw their chance to dishonor Jesus by saying he was insane.

In the ancient world, “being out of one’s mind” was attributed to demonic possession and that assumption was amplified by the religious leaders as they said Jesus performed his miraculous

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deeds of healing and casting out unclean spirits by the power of Satan **not** by the Spirit and will of God. For Jesus, to be dishonored in this manner was tantamount to a death sentence – in **every** sense of the word. Not only did it adversely affect the individual and all he stood for; shame was also brought upon his closest associates. These facts tempered the response Jesus gave as he called the scribes to him and told them parables framed around the rhetorical question he asked his accusers, “How can Satan cast out Satan?” (Mark 3:23). Jesus, according to the customs of his time, countered the scribes’ insult with reason as he spoke about the destructive and undermining effects of division – in a kingdom, a house, **and** Satan – **none** can stand if divided. However, a strong man’s home cannot be entered and what belongs to him cannot be taken unless the man was tied up or incapacitated in some way - as seen in this effort by the scribes to dishonor Jesus. And then Jesus clearly taught concerning the magnitude of the scribes’ attempt to dishonor him through their blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God that descended on Jesus at his baptism, called him beloved Son, named and empowered Jesus as the Messiah; and for the scribes to say Jesus was possessed by an unclean spirit and under the control of evil was the same as denying with their words **and** lives ---

- God’s Spirit,
- the traditions and laws of God the scribes so strictly adhered to, as well as
- the steadfast and loving relationship God has with humanity.

With this reply to the accusation by the scribes, Jesus redirected the focus from defeating division to the unifying strength possessed by Jesus and given to each person by the Holy Spirit that builds up and enables an integrity of faith to withstand **that** which is **not** of the Spirit of God.

At that time, as he focused his attention away from the scribes to the huge crowd sitting around him, we are returned to the beginning of the story as Jesus was reminded his mother, brothers, and sisters were concerned for Jesus and were asking about him - and it was **then** Jesus went from division and failure - as he taught a broad interpretation of family – not based on DNA but on the life-giving breath of God known as Spirit that we **all** possess. Yes, Jesus knew who his mother, brothers, and sisters were; he knew their concern and desire to attend him, but as Jesus looked out at the crowd that surrounded him, he named a different family, as once again with a nod to the creative and unifying power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus linked relationship between God

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2nd Sunday of Pentecost/Year B/June 6, 2021

and a diverse group of people to a **new** and **inclusive** spiritual understanding of kindred, bound in oneness by doing the will of God.

Over the next weeks as we study and learn about the elusive Holy Spirit, my prayer is through that same Spirit we will remember, build upon, and grow from the spiritual lessons given to us by the writer of Mark's gospel. First, that our families of origin - where we learn about being in relationship with and caring for another - although **primary** are not the sole category that provide spiritual connection to others. Along with our traditional families we have our brothers and sisters that are here in this place of worship. People with whom we remember Jesus and give thanks when we dine as the household of faith at the table set by the Holy Spirit – a meal that sparks our bond with the family of humanity we encounter out in the world during our daily lives --- **led** by the Holy Spirit to

- give care to the stranger,
- take time to understand each other, and
- develop and live in relationship with people who are totally different from us.

The Spirit that is at work in these actions is a dynamic agency for the fulfillment of God's will, and **that** – to paraphrase Jesus – is what makes us family. Our second lesson informs us to use our Spirit given gifts - that unify, not divide – that speak truth not deceit; that seek God's righteousness --- simply by doing what God commands us - to love. And in that single act bear fruit through the Spirit that result in “peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). However, let us not deceive ourselves in thinking this will be simple as we take a lesson from the scribes this morning. There will be those who do not understand or fear spirit-led and enable actions – and yes, most definitely yes --- we are to sit, commune, and seek reconciliation with those who reproach us. For, the Holy Spirit is a powerful and holy force of wind and fire that nudges and sometimes pushes us into action; that gives light during the darkness; and that is always present – building us up to be strong in our faith that gives all glory, honor, praise, and worship to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit today and every day.

Let us pray. Spirit of God you are life, way, gift, love, force - eternal contradiction - holy, just, presence. Not to be dishonored but praised – not to be unheeded but discerned. Through your molding and powerful wind and eternal fire create in us a people united in Jesus Christ – a great single family that is connected as one in the Spirit – commissioned to, identified as, and

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2nd Sunday of Pentecost/Year B/June 6, 2021

empowered by the Holy Spirit as those who do the will of God. We make this prayer in the powerful and triune name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.