

REFLECTIONS



THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 3:20-35

Then Jesus entered entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples 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.”

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THE MADNESS OF JESUS

by
Norm Wright

Jesus’ family was concerned. You can almost guess what their conversations must have been like:

“What’s going on? What is happening with Jesus? He’s not eating right; all that preaching, all those people. It’s not good. People are talking. Casting out demons! What next? Perhaps we should do a family intervention.”

So they go in search of Jesus.

They are not the only ones concerned.

Prior to today’s selection from Mark, we read that word quickly spread about Jesus who was healing people and casting out demons. People from all around, even beyond the borders of Galilee and Judea, were making the journey to hear Jesus and be healed by him.

And when that happens, the leadership in Jerusalem take notice and send some scribes to hear and see what Jesus is up to. After doing so, they arrive at the same conclusion as Jesus’ family has, “He’s out of his mind.” Beyond that, they conclude that if Jesus is, in fact, casting out demons, it stands to reason it is because he’s possessed himself and not by some generic demon, but by the Prince of demons, Beelzebul.

One can only imagine what Jesus must have sounded like and looked like after preaching and healing non-stop for days. Wild-eyed with the fervor of delivering a message of hope for the world, and unkempt from the press of the never-ending flow of people who had no where else to turn and no one else to give their hope for hope a chance. It is no wonder his family and others thought he was losing his mind.

But Jesus wasn’t losing his mind. Jesus was healing minds and liberating souls.

When he hears the scribes describe him as casting out demons by the prince of demons, he sees a teaching opportunity in which he offers one of his most enduring statements, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Jesus exposes an illogic that is present in every age, a resistance to evidential hope. The ones who object to hope are most often the ones who see power as their sole domain; those who fear they have the most to lose when hope emerges on its own.

Hope defies control. When hope takes shape and becomes realized those who fear it most cast righteousness as demonic, liberation as domination, and talk of love outside of their inner circle as subversive. Illogical theories like Satan casting out Satan are presented as fact because, in a polarized setting, one man's hope can become another man's fear. In short order, Jesus takes their illogic and exposes its fallacy.

What comes next is one of Jesus' most confusing statements about the eternal and unforgivable sin against the Spirit of God.

Mark concludes that Jesus gave the scribes this warning because they said he had an unclean spirit. It's not exactly clear what Jesus meant by this statement, and it may strike us as a bit over the top and out of character for Jesus. Nevertheless, it serves as a poignant warning to those who, in the name of God and religion, demonize people as a means of preventing them from healing the human condition and liberating the human soul. In karmic terms, Jesus could be saying that those who discredit the Spirit of God in others end up severing their tie to the Spirit that made us living souls; that is, diminishing their souls to the point their isn't much, if anything, of their souls left to forgive.

Another seemingly uncharacteristic moment for Jesus is when he is informed that his mother, brothers, and sisters had arrived and were asking for him. Instead of going out to meet them or inviting them in, he uses their presence as another teaching moment. In what comes across as a dismissive insult to their presence, Jesus asks the crowd surrounding him, "Who are my mother, brothers, and sisters?" Looking at those who came to hear and be healed by him, he says, "You are. You, who are doing the will of God are my family."

The madness of Jesus is in appearance only and he appears as such only to those who feared losing control and felt powerless against the good they couldn't explain and couldn't control; a power that defied conventional wisdom as to how, when, where and by whom such good things should happen to and be enacted by. For those whose hope was rekindled in Jesus' preaching, who experienced his healing and whose souls were liberated, they saw and experienced in this wild-eyed, unkempt Jesus the refining fire of God's liberating and life-giving Spirit.

This reading is particularly appropriate for a season devoted to the movement of God's Spirit in our world - Yes, even the world of our making; redeeming it and restoring it one person, one moment, one event at a time to the world of God's creating.

To discern the movement of God's Spirit requires one to step back, sometimes way back, to see the bigger picture. It requires letting go of what one thinks must happen or should happen to see within the madness of our times the good that is taking place, to recognize the hope that emerges in some of the most seemingly hopeless places and situations.

To discern the movement of God's Spirit requires a patient and prayerful heart that feel the Spirit of God's guiding movement that edges us ever towards the loving fulfillment of God's will, our true hope, the healing of our world and the liberation of our souls.

Amen.