

In the Struggle — Rev. Denise Stone

Text: Mark 3:19b-35

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 06-06-2021

^{19b} 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.

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.”ⁱ

The Word of the Lord, **Thanks Be to God**

Today’s passage finds Jesus at home, and the crowds continue to follow him. This passage follows on the heels of Jesus healing a man’s hand on the sabbath and the pharisees plotting against him.

Before we dive into the specifics of today’s text, we will be in the Gospel of Mark for a good portion of the summer. I want to point out that when reading the Gospel of Mark, you may find it useful to note when Mark uses a literary device referred to as a “Markan Sandwich”. Often it is a central story couched in the middle of another story. The two pieces together help in interpreting what Mark was trying to say.

Our passage here is a Markan Sandwich with three layers. Look at how the story is laid out.

	3:19b-20	Setting: Jesus at home/house, great crowds, cannot eat bread
A	3:21	Jesus’ family
B	3:22	Jesus accused of being possessed by Beelzebul

- C 3:23-27 Parables: A house divided and the strong man's house
- B' 3:28-30 Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit
- A' 3:31-35 Jesus' family.ⁱⁱ

The passage begins with a reference to home or house and the center piece of the passage is Jesus' parables about a house divided and a strong man's home.

We first encounter Jesus' family. They had come to the house to try to rein Jesus in – they were afraid Jesus was “out of his mind.” Then the religious leaders appear on the scene, accusing Jesus of casting out demons by the power of evil.

Against that backdrop, Jesus tells the two short 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.

By these parables, Jesus points out the absurdity of the pharisees' logic. A house divided cannot stand.

That this whole passage is bracketed by the story of Jesus family, is also significant.

At the beginning, Jesus' family arrives to "restrain" Jesus – thinking he was out of his mind. Dr. Judith Hoch Wray points out that the Greek here is literally "he has stood outside."ⁱⁱⁱ "The question of who is *outside* arises again and again. In verse 31 the family is standing outside, in contrast to their saying in verse 21 that he "has gone outside," that is, out of his mind."^{iv}

You may wonder what all of this is about. Why do we care how Mark set up his story? What. Is. The. Point?

This passage is full of conflict. Jesus is encountering conflict from his earthly family. Jesus is encountering conflict from the religious establishment of the day. Jesus is surrounded by a crowd of people that want to see more miracles – they are pressing in on Jesus and the disciples so much that Mark tells us they couldn't even eat.

Conflict and struggle.

In your own families and circles of friends, do you encounter conflict and struggle when you stand up for

what you believe in? When you try to follow God's way more than the ways of the world?

There are stories after stories of people around the world who have been rejected and suffered at the hands of their families and religious authorities for proclaiming their faith in Jesus Christ.

Today's story is not some remote event in the life of Christ, it is a continuing story in the life of the Church.

Conflict and struggle.

Yet, in the midst of the struggle, when Jesus' family is outside the house, asking for Jesus (again, to rein him in), Jesus issues one of the most profound statements about life in Christ.

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."

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Dr. Wray wraps up her thoughts on this passage by noting
Insiders and outsiders are now defined, not by
blood, but by commitment to doing God's will.
Meanwhile, the tension between the proclamation
of God's inclusive love and the natural human (and
church) proclivity to define outsiders and insiders
persists.^v

Insiders and outsiders are now defined, not by blood, but
by commitment to doing God's will.

For many, the table of Jesus Christ has been a place
defined by insiders and outsiders. In many places and in
many denominations, access to the table of Jesus Christ
has been restricted to those considered on the inside.

That is not how **WE** celebrate the life-giving event of Jesus
Christ.

This table is not my table. This table is not the table of First
Presbyterian Church of Big Flats.

This table is the table of Jesus Christ, and all are welcome
here. Even if you feel or consider yourself to be an
outsider.

Yes, there is conflict and struggle all around us; maybe even within us.

Jesus stands before you, inviting you to communion – with him and with each other.

You are welcome at **HIS** table.

ⁱ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱ Wray, Judith Koch. *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary.*, by David Lyon Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 3, Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. 117.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wray, Judith Koch. *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary.*, by David Lyon Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 3, Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. 119.

^{iv} Wray, Judith Koch. *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary.*, by David Lyon Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 3, Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. 119.

^v Wray, Judith Koch. *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary.*, by David Lyon Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 3, Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. 121.