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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
June 10, 2018
3rd after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 3:8-15; 2 Corinthians 4:13-18
Hymns: 239; 413; 408; 50:1 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Mark 3:20-35

²⁰ Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. ²¹ But when His own people heard *about this*, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."

²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons."

²³ So He called them to *Himself* and said 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 cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. ²⁷ No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.

²⁸ "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; ²⁹ but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation"—³⁰ because they said, "He has an unclean spirit."

³¹ Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. ³² And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You."

³³ But He answered them, saying, “Who is My mother, or My brothers?” ³⁴ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Is it real?

There is a show on cable TV that I find rather amazing. It's called the Carbonaro Effect. It's a sleight of hand magic show with a magician named Michael Carbonaro performing tricks in front of unsuspecting individuals. It appears so real, it makes one wonder. And for sure the people who fall victim to the hidden camera are completely fooled and baffled by what they have just seen. But the only powers that Michael Carbonaro possesses are powers of illusion. That's OK. He doesn't claim to be anything more than an entertainer. He isn't misleading anyone to their harm, only as a short term practical joke. He shows them the camera and explains it was all simply an illusion.

Things aren't always what they appear to be. We know that. As we get older we tend to become a little more skeptical, and yet people are often deceived because there are some deceivers out in the world who are very good at what they do. That, too, is nothing new. It has been that way from the beginning when the devil took the form of a snake and deceived Eve and then Adam into eating the forbidden fruit. So the great deceiver has continued to lead people down the path to destruction with his lies and deceptions to this very day.

Now there are those in the world, yes including those who are considered the wise of this world, who dismiss such ideas about the devil. They would even dismiss the idea that the devil exists. They would also question Jesus' power, suggesting Jesus' signs and wonders were simply elaborate hoaxes devised to deceive; or were

actually quite simple acts of kindness that suffered from hyperbole in the later telling by the apostles. These attacks on Jesus' power and authority, as obvious as they are, negatively impact the faith of many children of God. This world's bombardment of innuendo against the Jesus and all of Holy Scripture may erode the faith of children of God if it is not continually countered with the witness of the Holy Spirit that comes to us in the Word. So today the Spirit would encourage us in --

THEME: Comprehending the Reality of Jesus' Power.

In our text we see efforts being made to undermine --

I. The Validity of Jesus' Power.

The devil was on the attack. He used demon possession as a weapon to incite fear in the hearts of the Jewish people. It was a tactic of displaying his power over people in destructive and scary manners, opposing Jesus who was bringing the people the peace of God and the hope of everlasting life.

Crowds were drawn to Jesus. Such great crowds making such demands on Jesus' time that "they could not so much as eat bread." (v. 20) Jesus relatives were concerned for Him. Their concern was misplaced. They were afraid that with all the demands on Jesus that He was "losing it." Most Bible translations infer that they were thinking that Jesus was "out of His mind" at least to the point of losing sensibility. We might have said that they thought "Things were getting out of hand," that Jesus was letting people think more of Him than was proper. Now, maybe Jesus' brothers or cousins might have thought this, but we know that His mother understood exactly who and what Jesus was. She knew His power was real and that His power was for good, yet she may still have had her concerns for His wellbeing.

It wasn't only Jesus' relatives that were challenging Jesus' ministry. The local rabbis in Galilee had received reinforcements from Jerusalem. These highly respected scribes, scholars of Holy Scripture, suggested that Jesus had been casting out demons not by the power of God, but by the power of the devil.

So it is a rather complex situation, massive crowds pushing and shoving and calling out for Jesus' attention, Jesus' relatives trying to get hold of Him for fear that He was letting matters get out of control, and influential agents from Jerusalem suggesting that Jesus was in league with the devil. It was all part of the devil's game plan to undermine the legitimacy of Jesus' power and authority. What was one to think?

Jesus' response was powerful in itself. Jesus made it clear that the charge of the scribes from Jerusalem wasn't reasonable. The devil's tactic was to instill fear and so undermine people's confidence in the Lord. Jesus casting out demons from people restored them to peace and to faith in God. A house so divided against itself could not stand. Satan would be undermining his own strategy. What was being seen by the people was very real indeed. It was a valid use of God's power against the powers of evil. Jesus' own relatives needed to take note. Jesus' power is real and overwhelming the forces of evil. Things were not out of hand at all, but in the Lord Jesus' control.

We need to take this lesson to heart. We read the Scriptures. We read the many accounts of Jesus casting out demons, of Jesus exercising His authority over the power of evil, but too often we read these as if it's like reading a story in a book; it's just a story. Then, when we are confronted with the powers of the devil causing fear and confusion, we fail to do what the people in that crowd did, turning to Jesus, seeking His power to save. The devil is real, and it remains his game plan to instill fear and confusion and guilt and shame in the hearts of people, especially the people of God. The devil is real and the devil is powerful, and he does indeed have many minions in the spiritual realms, as well as many allies among flesh and blood people to do his bidding. **We need the power of Jesus!** We need to comprehend the reality of that power, and the extent of Jesus' authority, and understand that what Jesus commands is valid and real.

We need this because what Paul wrote to the Ephesians is most certainly true: *"We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."* (Ephesians 6:12) We need not fear. The power of

Jesus is real and present for us every bit as much as it was during the time of Jesus' visible presence on earth and the days of public ministry in Galilee and Judea. The assurance of faith that has been given to us by the Spirit of our God is stated quite simply by John in his first epistle: "*You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*" (1 John 4:4)

Another element of Jesus' response reflects how serious an error the Jerusalem scribes were making in their charge that Jesus was casting out demons by the devil's power. Jesus referenced their false characterization of the Spirit of Christ as a sin against the Holy Spirit, indeed THE sin against the Holy Spirit. It is one thing to fall into sin, even to blaspheme, but to declare the Spirit of Christ to be evil and to reject Christ as being of such an evil spirit, that rejection of the grace of God precludes faith and so would not be forgiven. From this preserve us dear Father in heaven!

We are blessed that by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit we are the beneficiaries of --

II. The Blessed Effects of Jesus' Power.

First and foremost let us take note of some precious words of Jesus spoken even as He was putting those scribes on notice regarding the serious nature of their sin against the Holy Spirit. These words can only bring joy to our hearts:

Mark 3:28 "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter;"

Do you understand the wonder of these words? All sins will be forgiven! ALL SINS WILL BE FORGIVEN! One of the devil's most treacherous tactics against us is that while other's sins may be forgiven, mine may not! Well, while you're at it, erode that doubt a little more then, by concluding "mine **won't** be forgiven." Maybe we think that because we did that sin once too often. Or maybe it's because we knew better than to fall into that sin. Or maybe because what we said or did was too hurtful, too bad to be forgiven. All those ideas are from the devil. If the devil cannot lead us into impenitence that we are determined to continue in sin, than he would seek to lead us to despair of forgiveness.

Jesus declares the truth of the gospel which He came to this earth to secure: “All sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter.” Even blasphemies. Yes, blasphemy, cursing God, or cursing by God’s name, or using Jesus’ name in a frivolous, careless manner, something you would not dream of doing with your mother’s name, but some do with their Redeemer! Yeah that’s bad, that’s really bad. And yet Jesus declares to you, to YOU, unconditional love and forgiveness from your Savior God. Your sins are forgiven. That is the foundation, the bedrock foundation of our faith and hope of everlasting life. It is that upon which all other blessings of salvation are built.

Consider then how Jesus with His power reverses the horror that we by our sin have brought into our relationship with God. The lesson is there for us in Jesus’ response to the information that his family was asking for Him, seeking to take Him away, perhaps for a good long rest.

Mark 3:33-35 “He answered them, saying, “Who is My mother, or My brothers?” ³⁴ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.”

If all you hear in those words of Jesus is a rebuff of His own family you are missing the gospel wonder. Neither is this a statement expressing how enamored Jesus was with the crowds that gathered around Him. This is a statement of what He is accomplishing with His power of salvation in this sinful world. Remember the lesson from the fall into sin. With the fall everything changed, and not for the better, but for much worse. The worst change of all was the change in the relationship between man and God. The peace and harmony created by God was destroyed by man’s sin. And so forever after “The carnal (or natural) mind IS enmity against God.” (Romans 8:7) “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” (Romans 5:12) Man is subject to death. There is far worse death than temporal death. Spiritual death is that state of unbelief which we can do nothing to change; WE can do nothing to change.

Ultimately there is eternal death, in which that separation between God and man is hopelessly sealed for all eternity.

Jesus changes that prospect, that relationship with His power. *“For He Himself is our peace, ... having abolished in His flesh the enmity.”* (Ephesians 2:14,15) The wonder of truth and grace Jesus points out is that we are brought back into a wholesome positive relationship with God. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.” (2 Corinthians 5:19) “We are reconciled to God through the death of His Son.” (Romans 5:10) We are brought back into the household of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Yes, it is all according to God’s plan that Jesus would fulfill this wonder of grace.

“God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” (Galatians 4:4-7)

Jesus by His power restored what our sin destroyed, and now we have this blessed peace with God through faith in His Son.

That is the Reality of Jesus’ overwhelming power to save Thanks be to God!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.