

June 6, 2021

A lot of our gospel readings, recently, have been from John... And today we are back in Mark. Today, I'd like to give a little context to our reading so we have a bigger picture of what's going on. And this will also be helpful as a way to reacquaint ourselves with the gospel of Mark.

One of the major themes in Mark is this whole idea of the kingdom of God. The gospel of Mark starts out with, Jesus saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent, and believe the good news."

Jesus is baptized and calls a couple fishermen, and begins a successful healing ministry. One of the healing stories includes a paralytic who couldn't walk. His friends lower him through the roof; Jesus sees the man, and says "My son, your sins are forgiven."

And this causes all sorts of problems... There were religious people in attendance! And as far as they were concerned, Jesus was committing blasphemy. So, almost immediately, Jesus and the religious people are at odds with one another. And that's just going into chapter 2!

And of course, things continue to go south... Jesus and his disciples don't fast when they're supposed to, they pluck grain on the Sabbath, which was a big no, no...

In chapter three, Jesus heals a man with a withered hand... And it happens to be on the Sabbath, and Jesus asks the religious people point blank, "Is it lawful on the

Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” They were silent, and right in front of them Jesus heals the man with the withered hand. The Pharisees and scribes are completely shocked and offended...

The texts say that “The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians” they wanted to destroy him. They wanted to cast him out!

And eventually we come to our text for today. The scribes send a delegation from Jerusalem and they accuse Jesus of being Beelzebul—which is the prince of demons. You see, in their minds Jesus was not only evil; he must have been the “head-honcho” of evil.

This is what is going on in our gospel lesson, Jesus is proclaiming the Kingdom of God, forgiving sin, and healing. And exactly because of that, he is accused of being the prince of evil.

We often think that good and evil is a simple matter of doing good things and refraining from bad. And that’s always a good start, but it’s much more complicated. You see, evil is never more powerful, than when it is hidden in righteousness.

In our reading from Genesis, Adam and Eve eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The serpent says that if they eat, they will be wise like God; knowing good and evil. They will be righteous!

And after they ate, they knew the difference between right and wrong and they knew they had done something wrong. They were ashamed; the text says they

were naked and hiding. Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the serpent, and everybody is pointing the finger at someone else.

And that's really one of our biggest problems, isn't it? We think we know the difference between good and evil. We spend a lot of time pointing our fingers, judging and accusing others... Let's call that behavior "casting out."

Quick story... I recently read an article about a couple in Wisconsin. During the last election, a husband tied up his wife so she couldn't do any campaign work for the candidate he didn't like. Can you imagine?

So, here, you have a husband and wife disagreeing on which candidate is evil and needs to be "cast out;" and essentially coming to violence with the husband tying up his wife, essentially "casting her out." The devil must have thought that was absolutely brilliant. Do you see the violence and destruction going on here?

Jesus asks, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand." Jesus is naming the game that Satan is playing. It's all about that "casting out." And ultimately, it only makes for a house divided that cannot stand. There is the Kingdom of God, and then there is the finger pointing, accusing and "casting out" kingdom of sinful humanity...

The good news today, is that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we are becoming ever more aware of how "casting out" is really the devil's game. Jesus was ultimately "cast out," he was hung on a cross...

And through the resurrection, Jesus offers forgiveness for all our “casting out.” For Jesus, the kingdom of God is all about forgiveness. You see, only forgiveness can bring new life. In God’s Kingdom, “casting out,” is transformed into bringing in and belonging...

And when you think about it, forgiveness is the only power that can transform lives. And as Luther says, where there is forgiveness, there is life. And Jesus has called us to be part of his new family, and to live by **forgiveness** as the true power of life. Amen...