

Sermon for Pentecost 3

June 10, 2018

“Are You In Or Out?”

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours from Jesus who binds up the devil with the gospel of forgiveness. Amen.

Dear Christians, it seemed like there was always a crowd. No matter where they went, whether it was casually mentioned in the market or announced at the dinner table or rumored in a neighborly conversation, the word spread, “Jesus is in town.”

And that was not the sort of news a person just shrugs off and forgets. That was the sort of news that got a cloak off the hook and sandals on the feet. People came to see Jesus. It seemed like there was always a crowd.

The crowd was colorful, made up of all kinds of people. Grizzled white hair framed crinkled, weathered faces on the older ones in the crowd. The hair on the younger ones was deep, dark, and black. Olive-tanned skin glowed on the many who spent their days laboring in the hot sun.

And everyone had their own opinion, including Jesus’ kin.

Jesus had done wonders. Nobody could deny it. Demons were driving out. Sick people hopped to their feet, healthy and vivacious. Jesus had done wonders. And wonders like these had to mean something, they had to be a sign.

Some dared to say it out loud: “Can this be the Son of David?”

Others heard them say it, and didn’t like it at all. “No,” corrected the Pharisees, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “He drives out demons by the ruler of demons.”

Jesus’ own people, his kinfolk, heard about the commotion and the crowd, and how the crowd was filling the house and how Jesus couldn’t even sit down to eat a decent meal, and they hurried to the house to come and get him, thinking that, perhaps as a result of the traveling and the crowds and the strain of it all, “He is out of his mind.”

So what’s going on with Jesus? Some people, like his relatives, felt that Jesus needed to be fixed. Some people, like the religious leaders (the Pharisees), felt that Jesus needed to be fought and resisted. Some were entertaining the idea that maybe, Jesus should be followed.

What do you think? Jesus was and is a polarizing figure. Some in that crowd thought there was something off about Jesus, something that wasn’t right.

His own people, his relatives, thought Jesus needed some fixing, and sometimes we think Jesus needs a little fixing too. His people thought that Jesus was too busy, too stressed, too pressed by the crowd, and sometimes, we think that Jesus expects, not too much of himself, but too much out of us. Does Jesus expect too much from us when he tells us to be flooded with his Word in our lives – not just in worship services but at home, every day, too? Does Jesus expect too much when he tells us to gather for worship, and even provides for us a safe, free country and a congregation that meets every week of the year? Do we need to fix Jesus and let him know that one day a month seems to be all we’ve got time for?

Or does Jesus expect too much of us when it comes to moral standards? Can Jesus really expect that modern people would wait for the wedding to move in and be intimate with each other? Can Jesus really expect that married people would be satisfied with just each other for a whole lifetime? Can Jesus really expect that parents will have time to study God’s Word and learn it so

well that they teach their kids all about him? Does Jesus expect too much of us when he tells us evangelize because we're scared and awkward and don't feel ready to do it?

The pull to want to fix Jesus a little bit, to tweak him, adjust his message, and then be ready to follow the modified Jesus can be pretty strong. That pull was strong enough to get a whole group of relatives together to try an intervention on Jesus.

That's not the only temptation that pulls at us, though. Sick-to-your-stomach horrifying as it is, there's a pull to join the Pharisees in fighting Jesus, to go further than thinking Jesus' message needs to be adjusted; thinking that it needs to be rejected.

Could anyone really be that foolish today? Yes, yes they can. I was in a meeting once for planning a funeral and the pastor suggested a text from Romans chapter 6, and handed a printed copy to the woman who was planning the funeral. She read the passage, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." Then she took the pencil in her hand and said, "I don't like the sound of this part," as she scribbled out, "The wages of sin is death." Are you crazy?! That's the Word of God you're scribbling out!

But what that woman did and what the Pharisees were doing wasn't all that different. Neither one wanted to admit that what Jesus says is it, the absolute truth.

And there's a temptation that pulls at us to do the very same thing. "God, do you mean to tell me that all people are corrupt and sinful? That I am corrupt and sinful? No, God, you're mistaken. Deep down, I'm a good person." We don't like to hear the Law; but we're also just as capable of complaining about the Gospel. "God, do you mean to tell me that I'm saved purely by your grace? There's really nothing about me that makes me more likable to you than Adolf Hitler? Nothing that makes me better than a drug addict. Come on, God, admit it, I'm saved because I'm better at following you than a lot of other people." Rejecting Jesus' message in favor of our own imagination has a strong pull.

And then we think about the people who dared to ask the question, in the account from Matthew, "Can this be the Son of David?" We might ask, in a similar vein, "Do we really need to follow him? Do we really need to have faith in him, repent of sin, and change our ways? Do we really need to take up our cross and follow him into suffering?"

Or, can we just be happy to think that Jesus loves us, no matter what, and that Jesus will be there waiting to fix our problems whenever we feel like we need it, that the church he blessed us with will just be there waiting for when we want a funeral or a baptism or a pretty wedding? Can we just take Jesus as a genie in a lamp and say, "I'll take a leap of faith, and Jesus will make sure everything turns out all right."

No. Jesus tells us that real, saving faith in him is specifically anchored in his death on the cross, and taking a leap of faith doesn't mean that we should chase a delusion and assume Jesus will make it all magically work out. Faith means we trust Jesus to keep his promises and that when he tells us how to live, it is the only way to live.

There were a lot of opinions in that crowd. There are a lot of opinions today. What's going on with Jesus? Do fix him? Do we fight him? Do we follow him?

To answer the question, we go directly to the source. What does Jesus have to say to this crowd and to us? What's going on with Jesus?

Jesus tells us he is the Son of David. He is the Messiah. He is the Savior of the world. He is the one to have faith in.

Jesus responded specifically to the accusation of the Pharisees. They said he was working for the devil. Jesus said, “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand but is finished.”

In the first place, the accusation makes no sense. Satan does not drive his own demons out of people. If Satan has someone in his grasp, he doesn't let them go willingly. The Pharisees were completely wrong about the situation.

Here's what's going on, according to Jesus, “On the other hand, no one can enter a strong man's house to steal his possessions unless he ties up the strong man first. Then he can plunder his house.”

Strangely, Jesus compares himself to bold thief. He wants something that belongs to someone else. Jesus wants people back who, in unbelief, belong to the devil. And Jesus says that he's like a thief, but not the sneaky kind. He's not a cat burglar wearing dark clothes stealthily creeping through the dark. Jesus says he's more like a one-man SWAT team. He rammed down the devil's door, tackled Satan to the ground, cuffed him, and now he's searching the whole house for whatever he wants.

Jesus said that's what was going on when he gave demons the boot. Jesus was ransacking the devil's house, freeing the devil's prisoners, taking back for himself precious souls. Jesus was doing exactly what the Son of David, the Messiah, the Savior was supposed to be doing. Jesus said it, “The reason the Son of Man appeared was to destroy the devil's work.”

In our second lesson, John the apostle saw the same thing in a vision from God. In this vision, Jesus is an angel coming down from heaven. John writes:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven. He had the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand. He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, bound him for a thousand years, threw him into the abyss, locked it, and set a seal on it, so that he could no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years come to an end. After this he must be released for a short time.

That's another powerful picture of Jesus, our Savior, showing that he has defeated the devil. One of the hymns we sang last week paints the picture of Jesus' ultimate defeat of the devil:

The foe was triumphant when on Calvary
The Lord of creation was nailed to the tree.
In Satan's domain did the hosts shout and jeer,
For Jesus was slain, whom the evil ones fear.

But short was their triumph; The Savior arose,
And death, hell, and Satan he vanquished, his foes.
The conquering Lord lifts his banner on high;
He lives, yes, he lives, and will nevermore die.

How did Jesus tie up the powerful devil? How did Jesus chain the dragon? He poured out his holy, precious blood as he died an innocent death and paid the whole price for sin and guilt. He redeemed you. That's how he bought you back so that you belong to him. He atoned for your sin – he made peace between you and God.

And that's why Jesus can make the amazing, gracious, sounds-too-good-to-be-true declaration, “Amen I tell you: Everything will be forgiven people, their sins and whatever blasphemies they may speak.” Are you guilty of thinking Jesus needs to be fixed? Are you guilty of fighting Jesus?

Are you guilty of wondering whether or not Jesus really needs to be followed? Hear the good news again: Amen I tell you: Everything will be forgiven people, their sins and whatever blasphemies they may speak.” You are forgiven. The fact that Jesus poured out his blood and burst out of the grave on Easter proves that to you. You are forgiven.

And through that message, Jesus continues to plunder and pillage the devil’s house. Jesus keeps on taking person and person from the devil as the Holy Spirit creates faith through the Word of God, breaking a person free from the devil and making them a child of God. That beautiful message of forgiveness is how Jesus keeps the dragon chained as he sends people like you and me out into the world to share the good news, destroying the devil’s work as the Holy Spirit brings more and more people to faith.

Which is why Jesus gives this important warning as part of his urging and pleading and command to believe in him and to trust his forgiveness. Jesus warns:

But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.

That’s a scary thought! An unforgivable, eternal sin? Did Jesus not cover that sin with his death? Or, more importantly, what if I’ve committed that sin!

If you are worried that you may have possibly blasphemed the Holy Spirit, let me first comfort you that if you had, you wouldn’t care. Blaspheming is to speak against something or to give total disrespect. You can see why blaspheming against the Holy Spirit would be unforgivable – if the Holy Spirit’s work to bring you the truth of Jesus the Savior and provider of forgiveness – and a person rejects the Holy Spirit’s work, refuses to believe in Jesus, spurns the forgiveness of God, scorns the love of God – well, of course, it’s only logical that person cannot be forgiven by faith if they do not have faith.

Jesus warning here was to all those who do not believe in him – rejecting the Holy Spirit is to reject God and Jesus and forgiveness. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit means that person will go to hell, directly to hell.

So that’s what’s going on with Jesus. What’s going on with you?

You have encountered Jesus like each person in the crowd. Unlike most of the people in that crowd, I started off this sermon by calling you Christians. People who have faith in Jesus Christ because the Holy Spirit did his work on you and you are people who say, “Yes, Jesus is my Savior from sin by his life, death, and resurrection.”

Because you believe that, you cannot help but do the will of God. In the first place, God wants you believe in him, which you do. That’s the will of God. God also wants you to gather for worship, to be in his Word, to be baptized, to love other people, to be responsible, to be productive, to be useful and you do those things too because you love God so much for saving you. You are what Jesus describes in Luke’s account, you “are those who are hearing and doing the word of God.”

And that means you are Jesus’ family. Jesus said this about you: “Who are my mother and my brothers?” He looked at those who sat around him in a circle and he said, “Look, my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

By faith, you are Jesus’ family. Amen.

Text: *Mark 3:20-35*

Jesus discusses the importance of having a true relationship with him.

²⁰They went into a house. A crowd gathered again so that they were not even able to eat a meal. ²¹When his own people heard this, they went out to take control of him, because they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

²²The experts in the law who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He drives out demons by the ruler of demons."

²³Jesus called them together and spoke to them in parables. "How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand but is finished. ²⁷On the other hand, no one can enter a strong man's house to steal his possessions unless he ties up the strong man first. Then he can plunder his house. ²⁸Amen I tell you: Everything will be forgiven people, their sins and whatever blasphemies they may speak. ²⁹But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin." ³⁰Jesus said this because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

³¹Then his mother and his brothers arrived. While they were standing outside, they sent word to Jesus, calling for him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him. They began to tell him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you."

³³He replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴He looked at those who sat around him in a circle and he said, "Look, my mother and my brothers! ³⁵For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."