

SERMON FOR THE 3rd SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
MARK 3.20-35.

Hymns: 339, 204, 384, 195, 287, 159.

Introit: Psalm 130.

P Out of the depths,

C I have cried to You, O LORD.

P LORD, hear my voice!

C Let Your ears be attentive to the sound of my pleas for mercy!

P If You, LORD, should observe iniquities,

C O LORD, who would stand?

P Nevertheless, with You there is forgiveness,

C so that You may be feared.

P I have been waiting for the LORD. My soul has been waiting,

C and I have been putting my hope in His Word.

P My soul waits for the LORD more than watchmen for the morning,

C more than watchmen for the morning.

P O Israel, hope in the LORD!

C For with the LORD there is mercy,

P and with Him there is very great redemption,

All and He Himself will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Collect: Almighty and eternal God, Your Son Jesus triumphed over the prince of demons and freed us from bondage to sin. Help us to stand firm against every assault of Satan, and enable us always to do Your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Genesis 3:8-15.

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1.

Gospel: Mark 3:20-35.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, Mark 3:20-35.

20 Then Jesus came into the house. Again the crowd gathered, so that Jesus and those who were with Him were not even able to eat bread. **21** When His family heard about it, they came out to take charge of Him. For they were saying, “He has gone out of His mind!” **22** The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem began to say, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and, “It is by the ruler of the demons that He is driving out the demons.”

23 Jesus called them to come to Him and spoke to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan?”

24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. **25** If a family is divided against itself, that family will not be able to stand. **26** If Satan has risen up against himself and has been

divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. **27** Rather, no one can go into the strong man’s house and plunder his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he will plunder his house.

28 Truly, I tell you, all the sins that the sons of men commit will be forgiven, and all the blasphemies that they utter. **29** However, anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, but is guilty of an eternal sin.”

30 He said this because they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

31 Just then His mother and His brothers came. They stood outside and sent someone to Him to ask Him to come out. **32** A crowd was sitting around Jesus, and they told Him, “Look! Your mother, Your brothers, and Your sisters are outside, looking for You.”

33 He answered them, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” 34 He looked around at those who sat in a circle around Him, and said, “Look! Here are My mother and My brothers. 35 Whoever does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother.”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.
Dear Friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

As I looked at the Gospel lesson in preparation for the sermon, I was struck by the irony of Christ's words. But it's not what you think. You see, Jesus doesn't use irony in this lesson. In fact, Jesus is very blunt and straight-forward and matter-of-fact in His words. There's no mystery or hidden meaning here. These words of Gospel are so easy that even the littlest of children understand them. Jesus, the stronger man, breaks in to our fallen and sinful reality and binds up the strong and deadly forces of sin, death, and the devil. This binding up of the strong by the stronger One, which Christ accomplishes through His perfect life, death, and resurrection, at the same time unbinds us and sets us free. The original Greek nails it. "Truly I say to you, all sins will be aph-i-ai-mied; that is, all sins will be loosed, unbound, set free...forgiven." Because of the all the redeeming work and person of Jesus Christ, the enemies of sin, death, and the devil are bound up and rendered harmless, and we are, in turn, unbound, set free, and given the gift of life. It's all so simple and straight-forward- really!

So where does the irony come into play? The irony arises, not in the words of the text, but in how we handle the text; - that is, how we perceive, respond and live our daily lives in light of this text. The sad irony of it all is grounded in the fact that we, who have been unbound and set free have a real problem with turning right around and binding everything right back up, including God. The fact that it's we who do the binding. The devil doesn't bind us up. He's the one who has already been bound up. All the devil does is dangle the ropes of law and works-righteousness in front of us, and we do the rest. Basically, the devil just gives us enough rope to bind ourselves up and hang ourselves with. Case in point: How often we hear these simple Gospel words of Jesus and what He does for us, and yet turn around and get focused on what we need to do or not do in order to be considered part of Jesus' family. Basically, we take Gospel and bind it right back up with the Law.

And I know the tendency in all of us right now is to say, "I get what you're saying, but that's not me." Yes it is. It's all of us. Everyone who still wears the flesh of Old Adam has the susceptibility to bind up what has already been unbound. It happens all the time. Just take a walk down the "religious" section at Q.B.D., or any other book store you'd like to name. It's basically nothing more than a sanctified self-help section - and the shelves are lined with best-seller after best-seller. People eat this stuff up. Why? Because Old Adam worries and stresses over his sin. "Have I done enough? Was that sin the straw that broke the camel's back? What do I need to do in order to make things right? What do I need to do in order to do God's will and be counted as part of the family?"

You see the Old Adam wants to know the "secrets" to making God smile. Old Adam wants to know how to discover God's purpose and will for leading a successful, fulfilling, happy God-pleasing life. This is why God's Word is so often and so easily reduced to a series of moralisms and platitudes. This is why God's Word is so often turned into therapeutic bullet points and self-help seminar material. This is why God's Word is so often and so easily morphed into terms of "here's what we need to do or not do."

Freinds: What does it mean to do the will of God? Remembering back to our Small Catechism days, ***"The will of God is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, all of which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom - His reign and rule - come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will."*** It's really quite simple. God's will is done when we let God work. He is the One who binds and unbinds, - doing so through His Word and Sacraments - His means of grace. God's will is done when we let Him speak; when we let Him define what is sin and what is righteous and God-pleasing; - when we let Him have the last word.

This is why I love the Greek translation of this text. Jesus begins with the last word. "Amen I say to you..." We translate that as "truly I say to you," but that's not how it reads. "Amen I say to you, all sins will be unbound/forgiven the children of man..." Jesus starts with the last word **"amen"** because there's

nothing else to say or add. The stronger man has spoken. All sins will be forgiven, and they will be forgiven precisely because the stronger man will bind up sin, death, and the devil and unbind us and set us free.

It's no co-incidence that immediately after speaking these words Jesus points to all those gathered around Him to hear this precious Gospel truth and says, "Here is my family." **"Look! Here are My mother and My brothers. 35 Whoever does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother."** Whoever does the will of God is part of the family. This is precisely what it means to do the will of God!

Those who are faithfully and humbly gathered around their Lord to listen and receive His life-giving, unbinding Words of grace, mercy, and peace are doing His will. To grab hold of Christ's victorious last word that proclaims our unbinding and our deliverance from the bondage of sin, death, and the devil - **"It is finished!"** - is what it means to do God's will.

"But pastor, you might ask, what's all that stuff about serving our neighbour and doing good works and stewardship and evangelism? That's all stuff we need to do. God does command all these things. That's all certainly part of God's will. How do we do all that stuff in right and God-pleasing ways? But all that so called stuff is given to us by God, and is not the stuff we choose of ourselves. That's what we struggle with." My friends: That struggle that you feel is the bonds of the law, which taunt you and torment you and bind you up with feelings of guilt and inadequacy and greed and control and pride. It makes you feel your not doing enough!

And this is precisely why I cannot and will not tell you what you need to do in order to free yourselves from these bonds of guilt and fear and pride and works-righteousness. To do so is to only giving you more rope to the binding. To do so is to only tighten the knots up and make even tighter the bonds which already cut and restrict and blind and kill. Instead, I point you - again - to Him who has already unbound you in His life, death, and resurrection. It is finished, in Him and because of Him! You are forgiven. You have been set free - totally and completely - in Christ Jesus.

It's this Gospel Good News that the Holy Spirit works in, not just in you, but through all of us who are bound up in the bonds of sin and fear and despair and hopelessness and anger and depression and every other soul-crushing, life-snatching form of bondage. It's this Gospel Good News of Christ-centered salvific Truth that unbinds and sets us free. **"And you shall know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free."** [John 8:32.]

It's this Gospel Good News that makes disciples of all nations. This is why I cannot and will not tell you what you need to do. To do so is to bind up and deny the work and power of the Holy Spirit of God. **"For I am not ashamed of the Good News. For it is the power of God to save everyone who believes it."** [Romans 1:16.] I will not tell you what you need to do or not do. It's not about Us! It's about Jesus! It's about what He has done and continues to do for us in His life-giving and liberating means of grace.

My fellow brothers and sisters and mothers in Christ: It's that simple. You want to know the will of God? Look right here! [*crucifix*] Here is the will of God, who desires that no man perish, but that all have life and have it to the fullest. Here is the will of God, who loved the world so much that He gave His only - begotten Son to die for it. Here is God's will for us - the wounds of Christ Jesus; wounds that poured forth blood and water in His once-for-all binding and unbinding act of crucifixion; life-giving water and blood that He still pours forth into our lives at the font and at the rail as He unbinds the mess we daily make, setting us free in His absolution and grace and peace.

Here is our life, our pardon, and our peace. There is no secret we need to unlock or a set of rules or mottos we need to live by or deeds we need to do or not do in order to be saved and set free and welcomed into the family. We have been set free. Christ Jesus has made us His own, unbinding us and setting us free in the waters of Holy Baptism, where He Himself declared, **"It is finished. Receive the sign of the cross upon your forehead and upon your heart, marking you as one who has been set free and redeemed in the blood of Christ."**

My dear brothers, sisters, and mothers in Christ: We are free. We are unbound in Christ and because of Christ. You want to know and do the will of God? Simply give the reason for the hope within you; for the

P For those who receive Christ's Holy Supper, that our heavenly Father use our Saviour's body and blood to forgive our sins, because if He marked our iniquities, none could stand; and that this meal nourish us as Christ's brothers and sisters to do the will of His Father, Lord in Your mercy;

C Hear our prayer.

P For those who have fallen asleep in the saving faith, let us give God our thanks and praise, asking Him to bring us with them to the joy of the feast that has no end, Lord in Your mercy;

C Hear our prayer.

P Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

4th Hymn: 195,