

Sermon for
All Saints Episcopal Church, Steenrijk
Leidenstraat at Heelsumstraat
Willemstad, Curacao

Proper 5 (B)

June 9, 2024

DRAFT

“Team Effort”

by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 3:20-35

The crowd came together again, so that
Jesus and his disciples could not even eat.

When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 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. Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit." Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters

are outside, asking for you.” And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Help us, Dear Lord, to love our team members as we love ourselves.

Amen.

A few years ago I was a part of a large scale response team of over 180 Red Cross volunteers for a mock Category 3 hurricane

called Mauricio that was to hit New Jersey and New York City. Let me emphasize, it was a drill, or as we continuously said as we communicated to others on this big team, “This is an exercise.” It was not the real thing. And as I said, the exercise was sponsored by the American Red Cross. We were testing our response readiness and making plans for an actual hurricane that, God willing, will never hit us. But the probability of such a hurricane is not zero, as we have seen in the fairly recent past. I have also participated in two other major disaster exercises, a mock thermonuclear

explosion in Secaucus, New Jersey, that supposedly would destroy the entire West Side of Manhattan, and much of New Jersey; and there was another exercise about an 8.0 Magnitude earthquake that was to occur along 125th Street in Manhattan. These were all ‘exercises’, not the real things.

The intersection of these events with today’s gospel is that we as volunteers worked best when we worked as a team, a cooperating self-supporting team.

Teamwork happens in families and sports teams and churches, but as the Gospel

according to Mark demonstrates today, sometimes our biological families can be more of a problem at times rather than a solution; that can also happen in sports teams and even in churches. Jesus' own mother and brothers were caught up in a tense situation where they feared Jesus himself might be acting irrationally, and as a result Jesus' own family came to get him in control.

While Jesus' brothers did not believe in Jesus during his lifetime (John 7:5), Jesus' brother, James [later who would become

known as a writer of one of the Epistles] was an important personage in the early church (Acts 12:17; 15:3; 21:17-26; Galatians 1:19—2:14). James, Jesus brother, was a leader in the Jerusalem church and possibly the first bishop of Jerusalem.

And, also, Jesus' own mother was suspect of him, and yet many today think almost as much of her as her son.

Methodist bible scholar Dick Donovan writes, 'This verse about Christian families

has been of great comfort to Christians who have found themselves separated from their birth families by faith. The faith community becomes their new family.’

And Donovan notes further, “Jesus acknowledges elsewhere, however, that faith requires disciples to put God above family and sometimes results in families divided over the issue of faith (Matthew 10:37; Mark 10:29-30; Luke 12:52-53).

Faithfulness to families is important, but faithfulness to God is even more important.”

Another sticky topic is also included in today’s gospel about sinning against the

Holy Spirit: “Sin is a common problem—if it afflicted the Apostle Paul, surely it must afflict the rank and file Christian—so we ourselves need to reassure Christians that their ordinary sins do not constitute the sin against the Holy Spirit.

“It has further been noted that people who worry about sinning against the Holy Spirit are not likely to be guilty. The fact that they are [even] concerned reflects the work of an active conscience that is likely to keep them safe. It is unlikely ever to occur to the truly guilty person to worry about

being guilty [of sinning against the Holy Spirit].

[Dick Donovan:]

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/mark-320-35/>

When the scribes said Jesus had ‘an unclean spirit’, Jesus noted that that was tantamount to the unforgiveable eternal sin, calling the Holy Spirit an ‘unclean’ spirit.

But let us return to ‘Who are our families’? Jesus admonishes us to ‘love our enemies’ and ‘love others as we love ourselves’. This ‘commandment’ is above all others, so how can we not love our

family members as we love ourselves, regardless of how we may be able to get along with them?

I must say, in my experience with people under great stress, as are many homeless people, I usually find their predicament can often be traced to some break with their biological family. This can happen if one's supportive mother or father dies or becomes disabled; and I have heard the stories of bitterness occurring between siblings over inheritances and financial matters relating to the passing or a serious disability of a mother or father.

We never hear of Jesus' father Joseph after Jesus was about twelve years old, so many think Joseph must have died when Jesus was between age twelve and thirty, as Jesus never mentions his father; and at his crucifixion Jesus places his mother in the care of the Beloved Disciple as Jesus hung on the cross: one of Jesus' last words looking down on his mother and the Beloved Disciple from the cross were: 'Woman, behold your son. (And Jesus said to his disciple), 'Behold your mother'. Jesus' concern for his dear mother was apparently not at all affected by today's

gospel action when Mary came with her other children to ‘restrain’ her elder son Jesus. Jesus mirrors ultimate forgiveness to us even as he hung dying on the cruel cross.

“About six hundred years ago, the theologian and preacher Thomas a Kempis wrote, ‘Do not place much confidence in weak and mortal man, helpful and friendly though he be; and do not grieve too much if he sometimes opposes and contradicts you. Those who are with us today may be against us tomorrow, and vice versa, for men change with the wind. Place all your trust in God; let Him be your fear and your love.

He will answer for you; He will do what is best for you.”” (Quoted June 9, 2018, in Propertalk by the Rev. Robert Morrison from: “The Imitation of Christ” by Thomas a Kempis, Book Two, The Interior Life, The First Chapter, Meditation. See – Book 2 of The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis - Cyber Library

www.leaderu.com/cyber/books/imitation/imb2.html

[A picture of a baby hippo and a giant tortoise is available at:

<http://www.snopes.com/photos/animals/hippo.asp>



By looking at animal behavior, we can learn a lot from animals about how humans bond and form groups. There is a truly heart-warming story about a baby hippopotamus, named Owen, who was swept down a river and into the ocean when a tsunami struck and then was tossed back to

shore by waves and landed on the coast of Kenya in Africa.

Wildlife workers rescued Owen and took him to a shelter where he was adopted by a one-hundred-year-old male tortoise that acted as his mother. (Show picture. Don't they look happy together?)

Baby hippos like to be with and play with their mothers until they are about four years old. These two, the hippo and the tortoise, although very different from each other, became fast friends that ate, slept and swam together. The big male tortoise liked being a mother, and Owen liked his new mother.

The two of them formed a family. How wonderful!

What we can learn from this story is that close family members may come in many forms. Not all of us are blessed with families that include a mother, father, brothers, and sisters. Families are made of people who love and care for each other.

We find friends, in our church and elsewhere, who are loving and caring. They make good family members. Jesus says, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Amen.

Proper 5 (B)

June 9, 2024

“Team Effort”

Description:

Jesus calls his followers his closest family members, but still never forsakes his mother to his dying breath. Our families may be those of our church, those who love and serve the Lord together with us. We can be a team for Christ.

Tags:

Tortoise, hippo, family, close, homeless,
stress, blaspheme, Holy, Spirit, unclean,
unforgiveable, sin, mother, brothers, Mary,
Red, Cross, exercise, hurricane, earthquake,
nuclear, New Jersey, Secaucus, New York,
team, Thomas, Kempis, followers, gospel,
Mark

St. Stephen's ProCathedral

35 South Franklin Street

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

The Second Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 5B

June 7, 2015

“Free Again, at Last, Free Again”

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 3:20-35

Help us, Dear Lord, not to bind your hands when you are trying to rescue us.

Amen.

Jesus had to escape crowds several times during his ministry. A number of times the crowds wanted to kill him, they even tried to throw him off a cliff after his first sermon, which should give pause to the newly ordained! Eventually Jesus would be arrested, confined, strapped to the crossbar of the cross, then nailed to the cross, and wrapped tightly in a linen shroud after he died; but in the end, Jesus escaped every one

of the puny things with which we humans had devised to tie up and control him. And Jesus was far better than Houdini as he was able to escape a stone cold tomb with a huge rock rolled against its opening even after he was dead! In today's Gospel lesson we hear a story that his own mother and brothers had come to seize him—and in a way that intrusion of his family was a signal that Jesus' crucifixion was not far away.

When our own family wants to disown us, corral us, commit us, things are indeed looking pretty bad! Sure, maybe Jesus' family was just trying to save Jesus from his

fame, or infamy, depending on how one wants to interpret his family's motives. In just three short years Jesus was able to turn all world civilization on its head, and we haven't recovered yet!

But as we learn how to be free, really free, free in Christ, by following him, we find ourselves casting off shackles perhaps others had tried to put on us. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord of our life and the Lord of our freedom.

Each Thursday evening I go to the big federal immigration detention center in a warehouse near the Newark Airport to

minister to those who have been recently rounded up from incoming international flights, from work sites, and from local jails and prisons, those immigrants who did not have proper papers for immigration into the United States. Several had been living here in the US for more than a decade, working and raising families—many with one or more children who were born in the United States. A number are being deported back for example to Jamaica--I thought Jamaica had some sort of immunity to deportation, but that is not so; others to Guatemala, Ecuador, Columbia; and others to the

Ukraine and some to Syria, can you imagine being deported back to Syria?!. Those in the detention facility have been federally detained by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, ICE, and they will likely be returned, in shackles, with their wife and children on the next plane to their homeland if their case is adjudicated against them. Those with criminal convictions are treated the same as those without convictions, but the new Immigration policy this year tells the Detention Center particularly to focus on deporting any who have or who have had a criminal conviction

of some sort during their stay in the United States. But now a few non-criminal non-documented immigrants are able to stay in the US with the payment of a bond averaging around \$5,000, should their families and friends be able to round up that amount from their below minimal wage jobs, and are permitted to stay in the US for a little while it seems.

We go there to the Detention Center Thursday nights to do Bible study using the Alpha DVDs, to sing together, to pray together, and to give a ray of hope from the outside where soon they too will be, either

in the US or in their home country, depending on the outcome of their hearing. In the interim, they are in federal detention, behind many levels of locked doors, with guards everywhere, but unarmed guards, so it probably feels a bit less oppressive than a prison would feel. Their treatment is relatively gentle, for such a place so filled with iron bars and heavy locks; but frisking occurs each time a detainee leaves one room and goes to another. Security is always very high. And when they are transported to the airport they are transported in shackles, just as though they were a major felon, even if

they have never committed any crime. It is harsh treatment for innocent people who were simply seeking safety and work to feed their families both here and back home.

Once Jesus was arrested, soon after the Gospel reading for today, I am sure his security detail was just as tight and just as unyielding as the Federal immigration system. Jesus had been seized by the Temple Police, and he could not escape, and no one could get in to visit him, unlike our detainees who after years of campaigning can now have family visits. But to think the Son of God could actually be immobilized

like that for long was both a folly and a fallacy. His Father in heaven would eventually loose all his Son's bonds and raise him to life again. Jesus will not be bound for long.

The word play on the image of a “strong man” in our Gospel reading for today has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Who exactly is the “strong man?” The preceding sentences in that passage of scripture use the word Satan several times, so that is who we think of as the strong man--Satan must be the strong man. And Jesus is plundering the strong man's house by first tying him up—if

this is what the passages about the “strong man” mean. Or maybe there some sort of competition between Satan and Jesus. Satan indeed must have felt strong since he thought he had won once Jesus was arrested, nailed to the cross, and died. And Satan surely celebrated for a day or two. But even in that time on Holy Saturday Jesus descended to the realm of the Dead which one assumes Satan was in control of or would eventually be in control of, and Jesus preached to those there in the realm of the dead, ‘and led them out,’ and by implication, led them up to heaven. In the Orthodox

Christian church, this event is referred to as the “harrowing of hell.” While Jesus’ body was presumably in the state of death on earth, dead in Satan’s eyes at least, Jesus in the Spirit was already busily at work preaching repentance and salvation to those who had preceded him in death--Adam, Eve, Noah, Moses, David, Samuel, and so on. Satan’s feared enemy Jesus had invaded Satan’s house in hades and had gained release of those who chose to follow Jesus out of that place of death, as Jesus himself is lifted by his heavenly Father from the realm of death. Satan had been confined to our

world here, bound here as a prisoner of the only place where Satan was still able to be the governor for a while, as Satan the angel had been thrown down to earth from heaven after losing a great heavenly battle with God and the archangels. Satan was and is the ultimate Loser with a capital “L,” but Satan indeed has not given up, and Satan won’t give up until the end of time. We face him daily in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

And Satan as the evil angel, being stronger than we puny humans, Satan always “seems” to have the upper hand, or he wants us to believe he has the upper hand. And many

times Satan even plots and carries out even our own death—and the death of an innocent infant or even a fetus, or the death of one of our loved ones, but eventually Satan does conspire to cause our own death. But we who have placed our trust in the One True God and God’s Only Beloved Son Jesus Christ, we believers have in President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s words, we believers have ‘nothing to fear but fear itself.’ Our way to the heavenly realms with Jesus has already been paid for by Jesus’ atoning death on the cross. Jesus’ death has wiped away the sins we have confessed to

him, and Jesus sets us free to do his work in the world.

Perhaps we have been worrying about our death or someone else's death. Of course all of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God, but we as Christians have the assurance that our death cannot be and will not be an eternal death. Satan cannot control our fate once we have died, only God can determine that, and God listens to his beloved Son who is constantly interceding for us.

So to 'Get right with God' as some highway signboards tell us, to get close to

God, we must first come to the feet of his Son and confess our sins, sins which of course God already knows, but God wants to see if we are indeed sorry for our sins and if we will promise not to keep committing those sins over and over again. And in fact, God's Holy Spirit is dispatched to us to help us in every way to stay away from those sins of omission or sins of commission that we are all prone to do and get bound up in doing.

There is no way in heaven that Satan will ever be able to defeat and tie up our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The battle was

definitively won by Christ at the site of the empty tomb two thousand years ago. And that power and Spirit of Christ is always protecting us wherever we go, in this world and in the next.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.