

A House Divided

Mark 3:20-35

Many hours of my youth were spent splitting wood. I have a whole host of stuffed animals to prove it. Whether it is at a county fair or an amusement park like Adventureland, I have not yet met a bell I can't ring. Swing the hammer, ring the bell, walk away with a stuffed animal.

Splitting wood always involved a wedge – an axe if it was a small piece, the splitting maul if it was a bigger chunk, or metal wedges and a sledge hammer if it was an 8 foot section of tree trunk.

Wedges divide. They work right in to split apart. There are physical wedges like those I used to split wood. There are also more cerebral, though no less real, wedges we allow to split and divide like race, religion, or political party.

I don't watch TV news, but even I cannot escape being bombarded with the message of how divided we are as a country. I'm not buying what they are selling. The particular product changes periodically, but what they are selling remains the same: fear or hatred, or a combination of the two.

For quite a while it was fear of global warming. That went away, kind of. They use a different name for it now. For a while it was hate of Donald Trump. He went away, kind of. He's not our president anymore. This past week I got a piece of mail that warned I am in imminent danger of having government officials storm my house, confiscate my guns, and take me to prison. That news is supposed to motivate me

to send them \$30.00. Fear and hate are motivators, not good ones, but they get people to do things. I haven't sent the \$30.00, though I haven't thrown away the envelope. The free backpack is tempting.

Fear and hate. One or the other, or both, motivated the teachers of the law to go after Jesus: *He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.*

Being possessed by a demon was not the same thing as having a mental disorder. That's what some of Jesus' family members were saying about Him: *He is out of his mind.* Sounds like there was some division there as well.

We are no strangers to family tension. We find it in our own families. We fuel it in our own families with our unkind words and bad attitude.

We are no strangers to division in school or at work. Long division can be a problem for some. It would be great if that was the only dividing going on. But it's not. The students find all kinds of ways to cause division among themselves. Any girl or boy could be in our out based on fashion sense, athletic ability, personal hygiene, or a host of other reasons.

We don't change a whole lot when we enter the work force. Many companies have team building activities, or my favorite – sensitivity training. Employers know that division negatively impacts productivity, and so they try to overcome it.

They try, but what if we don't? Will things get better? Is that what Jesus is getting at with his strong man story? That if

we want get rid of division our lives, we just need to be strong? Don't let fear or hate govern our actions? That if we want to be safe from sin and Satan, all we need is to be strong enough to keep from being tied up?

How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.

A strong man is mentioned, but is it us? How has it been working for you? Have you been strong enough to keep from being tied up? What if you try even harder to be strong, is it going to work?

The Good News is that Jesus is the strong man. He has tied up sin and Satan so that they will not defeat you.

In fact, to think that you are doing just fine on your own is what Jesus is warning against – blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. “I don't need you. I'm living a pretty good life. I'm doing a lot better than a lot of people I know. Thanks, but no thanks. There's not really a place for Jesus in my life.”

Chances are that you have had thoughts like these. But only if you persist them, willfully rejecting the work of the Holy

Spirit in your life, are you guilty of sinning against the Holy Spirit.

We certainly sin, many times a day, but we realize it and repent. We know we need the Strong Man in our lives because we are not strong.

Jesus is the strong man. He was neither out of His mind or possessed by Beelzebul. He was and is exactly who He said was – the Son of God who came in to the world as its Messiah, to save people from their sins.

Jesus' promise in the text is certain: *people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter...* That promise is for you. There is no sin that is not forgiven when there is faith in Jesus. It is unbelief that is the sin against the Holy Spirit – the unforgiveable sin. All others can be and are forgiven because of Jesus' blood shed on the cross.

God forgives the murderer and adulterer. God forgives the thief and gossip. God forgives greed and jealousy. God even forgives hate and fear.

Is there a particular sin that is bothering you? Jesus loves you. Jesus died for you. Jesus rose from the grave to forgive **all** sins and **every** slander. Those words are very inclusive. Jesus forgives all your sins. Jesus forgives every sin.

There are all kinds of wedges in our world, but nothing is going to divide or separate you from God's love for you in His Son, Jesus. St. Paul ends chapter 8 of Romans, and I end this sermon, with this promise from God to you: [nothing] *in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen!*