

This morning we are going to be reading from the 3rd chapter from the gospel of Mark. Last week we read two stories of Jesus carrying out a healing on the Sabbath and affirming his disciples for picking grains to eat on the Sabbath.

The Jewish leaders were incensed that Jesus has such a low view of their strict Sabbath interpretation. In today's passage we are going to see this conflict begin to become amplified.

Just prior to the text that we will be reading, the crowds that follow Jesus begin to swell. We are told that people are coming from great distances to be cured of their diseases. We are told that whenever demonic spirits encounter him that they recognize him as the Son of God.

In Mark's version of Jesus' life, it is here that Jesus appoints 12 followers whom he calls apostles. These 12 apostles are called to proclaim the message of the good news that Jesus is teaching. The 12 are named just before the passage that we will be reading.

In this passage that we are about to read, the family of Jesus is worried. They are worried that Jesus is suffering from mental illness and they are going to try to find him and bring him back home.

Along with these concerns about Jesus suffering from mental illness, we are going to hear a debate about how Satan or evil is revealed.

Read Mark 3:19b-35

Author Karen Young says the following:

“The best part of being human is being able to connect with other humans. We’re hardwired for it. We live in tribes and families, work in groups, love as couples and thrive in friendships. The drive to connect is in all of us whether we acknowledge it or not.

Yet, we’re seeing more loneliness, more depression, more broken relationships, more suicides, more disconnection. What’s happening?

Vulnerability is the driving force of connection. It’s brave. It’s tender. It’s impossible to connect without it. But we’ve turned it into a weakness.

We’ve made ourselves ‘strong’. We’ve toughened up, hardened up and protected ourselves from being hurt. We’ve protected ourselves from vulnerability and disallowed the surrender. Here’s the problem.

When we close down our vulnerability we are shielded from hurt, but we are also shielded from love, intimacy and connection. They come to us through the same door. When we close it to one, we close it to all.”

This lack of connection which Karen Young discusses in this article leads each of us down roads of division and separation. We separate ourselves from one another which leads to misunderstanding and lack of trust.

We don’t confront our own prejudices which leads to division and separation. And in the text that we just read, division and separation are tools of Satan.

In this text that we read, Jesus' family is concerned. They have heard about what their relative Jesus is doing and they think he is battling some sort of mental illness. In fact, when he returns to Nazareth the family sends a couple of family representatives his way to restrain him.

Others in Nazareth are calling his mental illness something much worse. Many are saying that Jesus has become a tool of Satan.

But Jesus challenges both his family and others who accuse him of carrying out Satan's wishes. Jesus says that the actions of Satan can be found any time that we see people trying to create division. In a quote that many of us have heard, Jesus says that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

So how do we know that Satan is at work? According to this passage, whenever we see division and separation being created then we see signs of Satan at work. This division happens within our families. This division happens in our country. This division happens in our world.

We see the seeds of division in our families. Many of us come into worship today pained by the division and separation in our families. Separation and division caused by events and personalities beyond our control.

But this text gives us motivation to do what we can to break down separation and division. We may not be very successful in helping to bring about healing. But we can be assured that the act of trying to help families overcome their hostilities is an act which works against the work of Satan or demonic forces.

We see division in our country and in our world. We know and hear a lot about division in our country. We see division racially, we see division politically, we see division economically. But when we seek to overcome these barriers then we are working against the forces of evil and Satan.

Many of us have a hard time listening to Jesus on this one. We would rather defend a political ideology rather than seek to bring about healing. We would rather put others down than seek to find common ground.

When we join in the chorus of tearing others down then we are participating in acts of Satan. When we join in breaking down barriers then we are participating in acts of God.

In this text that we read, the family of Jesus shows up and tries to take him away. Jesus responds by expanding his definition of family. Jesus says that family is not just about blood. Jesus, instead, says that anyone who does the will of God is family.

So, as we encounter division and as we are invited to take part in acts that bring division, we are invited to ask ourselves this question. Am I contributing to this division? If I am acting in ways that promote division then I may be acting in coordination with Satan.

If, instead, we seek to bring broken parts together, then we may be acting in coordination with God. A house divided against itself cannot stand.

A house or a family or a church or a nation united, can be used by God to create some incredible witnesses to who God is and what God is doing. AMEN.

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-Young, Karen, <https://www.heysigmund.com/vulnerability-the-key-to-close-relationships/>

-Given: June 10, 2018 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)