

Sermon – Mark 3:20-35
David R. Lyle
Grace Lutheran Church
2 Pentecost – Year B
6 June 2021

“A House United”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. How good it is to be here today! To be together in person, to lift our voices together in praise, after so many months apart, in this home we share at Grace. To be sure, we're not all the way home yet. Many are still joining us via livestream today, and we rejoice at your presence, for you are very much here with us. We have further yet to go before we're back to normal, or have arrived at a new normal, as we emerge from this pandemic. We still live with capacity limits and facemasks and assorted alterations to our worship practices. Nevertheless, today feels good. After such a lengthy displacement, things are falling back into place. How good it is to be here today, whether you're in this room or your living room, singing praises to our God. A mighty fortress, indeed!
2. We were made for moments such as this, humans living together in community in the presence of God. Genesis, however, reminds us that the human story is all too often the renunciation of God's intention for us. Adam and Eve, tempted by the serpent, take their fate upon themselves. Rather than trusting in God's plans and purposes, they seek to determine what is good and evil, what is right and wrong, thinking they know better than God. In so doing, they drive wedges between themselves and God, between themselves and creation, and just plain between themselves. They are sent forth from the garden, displaced by their sin. Their story is our story, for we

each have a rebellious old Adam or old Eve alive and at work in us. We make the sinful choice of the garden every day, thinking that we know best for ourselves and those around us. In our sin we dislocate others, drawing boundaries around our spaces and declaring who is clean or unclean. Our world suffers under the weight of racism, which continues to lead many to say who matters and who doesn't. During this month of Pride, we recognize and confess that for too long we have failed to create spaces in which our LGBTQ siblings are welcomed and valued. We continue to stigmatize mental illness. We have turned on creation itself, doing damage to the planet that may not be repairable. We have, in these and so many other ways, given ourselves over to the power of sin, in thought, word, and deed. We cannot free ourselves. We are in bondage. So bound, we are displaced. From the garden. From God's presence. From peace with one another, peace with this world, peace with ourselves.

3. We have turned from God, but God in Christ returns to us. But we are so trapped in sin, so dislocated, that we do not recognize him at first. The scribes, consummate insiders, give voice to our doubts about this teacher who has thus far cast out demons, cured maladies, claimed authority over the sabbath, and called a cast of outcasts to be his inner circle. Looking at Jesus, they suggest that the only possible explanation is that he is possessed by a demon, Beelzebul, ruler of demons. His own family thinks he is out of his mind. But it is not Jesus who is possessed by a demon. He, in fact, is the only one who is in his right mind. He is possessed, but it is no demon who holds him in thrall. No, he is in possession of the Holy Spirit, whose possession leads never to bondage but always to freedom. Jesus is in his right mind, and he sees the problem quite clearly. This whole world is possessed by a strong man, the evil one who keeps us bound in sin and evil, dislocated from God's presence, living together in a house deeply divided.

4. Jesus journeys into this far country of sin and death to set us free and bring us home. While we have never been a match for the evil one, that strong man is no match for Christ. Today's reading is early in the story, but we know its end. Jesus will enter all the way into the home evil has made in this world. He will give himself over to the forces of violence and tyranny, hatred and death. But in seeking victory over the Son of God, the forces of evil reach too far and create their own downfall. For the Jesus they, we, crucify, is also the Jesus who will be raised from the dead. In his rising shall the old house come crashing down, inviting us home again, calling us into God's presence. In Christ alone is there hope for this world. By Christ are the chains of bondage released. In Christ are we dislocated no more.

5. My Facebook feed has begun to fill up with pictures of people setting out on family vacations. My mind wanders to some of my favorite summer trips from years past, including adventures in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. There's something incredible about spending a long day paddling and portaging, going as far as your body will take you and then setting up camp for the night. I love sleeping in a tent far from civilization, where you can hear wind and water and the sounds of the woods. Of course, those sounds that make tent camping so delightful also remind you of the precariousness of your position. There is little between you and the world, little to keep you safe from downpours or lightning or the creatures that call such places home. I love sleeping in tents, but there's also not a much better feeling than crawling into your own bed on the first night home.

6. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, describes our earthly bodies as tents. They are wonderful, to be sure, but fragile. Perhaps this is why we give in to sin and evil so easily, doing whatever we can to shore up our defenses and batten down our hatches. We usually only make matters worse, for ourselves and for others. Jesus comes to do what we cannot. The promise is hidden in his very name. Jesus, we know, means "the Lord will save." But as Fred

Niedner points out, the Hebrew name, *Yeshua*, is related to the Hebrew word for saving, which literally means “to make or give a place.” Jesus is the one who saves us by being the Lord who makes a place for us. In plundering the house of the evil one, Jesus has cast down the powers of this world. In his resurrection, he creates a new home for us, raising up our fragile bodies with promises imperishable. Jesus invites us home, and home is wherever Jesus is. Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism, we renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God. Sealed by the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves in our right mind for the first time. Gathered together by the God who always simply wanted to be with us, we find ourselves with siblings abundant. In this new community, all that is needed is faith in Christ, itself a gift of the Spirit. There is no other marker or barrier, and none need be left out anymore.

7. As we emerge from the pandemic, it is good to be here today. It is also a good time, perhaps, to think about what sort of “here” God is calling us to be. This reading from Mark’s Gospel points us in the right direction. We see here that all are welcome. Not as a banal bromide or a slogan, but because Christ has come to set people free. All people. To cure us of our sinful madness and restore us to God’s presence. There are no other markers in play. Those who are different from us, those who are unclean by the world’s standards, are welcome here. Those who have never known, or who have lost, the love of a parent or spouse, or the joy of having sisters and brothers, are welcome here. Those who battle demons and those who live with mental illness are welcome here. Demons and mental illness, it must be said, are not the same thing. But they are both real, and those who live with them are welcome here. Here, at Grace and in the grace of God, Christ is creating a new family for a new normal. We’re not all the way back yet; we have a ways yet to go. But already we hear the promise: In Christ, your sin is forgiven, and evil is defeated. Healing and hope flow from his cross. We are bound and divided no more. We are home with the One who makes a place for us, who calls us family. The Kingdom’s ours forever. How good it is to be here. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.