

*20and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." 22And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." 23And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27But 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.*

*28"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— 30for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."*

*31Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." 33And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" 34And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."*

Some weeks when we gather here, we walk some very familiar ground: Jesus feeding the five thousand, walking on the water, calming the stormy sea. Today's gospel takes us on a path that is not so well traveled.

We begin with these words: *Then Jesus entered a house and again a crowd gathered so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.*

People crowding, reaching touching - Jesus and his disciples being consumed by the crowds' needs. Like a man opening a suitcase of money on a crowded street and suddenly everywhere there are hands reaching, a pressing in - chaos. No wonder Jesus so often retreated to the sea, or to the hills, or to a lonely place. The crowds were crushing him.

*21When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind."*

Mary and Jesus' brothers heard and they came to take hold of him. They loved Jesus and they wanted to keep him safe, to protect and guard him. They wanted Jesus to return to the normal world of saws and boards and hammers.

Now as Mark tells us this story as he so often does, Mark leaves Mary and Jesus brothers for a moment to tell about some others. After a bit we will hear about them again.

*And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, He is possessed by Beelzebul and by the ruler of demons he casts out demons.*

These were the men in the know - the experts. They were people who had the role that I have, speaking God's word to God's people. They declared that Jesus came not from God but from Satan.

*So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "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."*

A kingdom, a house, an end - division. As Jesus spoke the hearers knew Satan was not divided - working against Satan.

But what of Jesus' family, what of God's people? Are they divided, will they come to an end?

Jesus continued: *"In fact no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house."*

Jesus once said that he told the parables to confuse, so that seeing the people would not see and hearing they would not hear otherwise they might turn and be forgiven.

Things are not as they seem to be - pay attention.

Who is the strong man, who is being tied up, who is being robbed?

Look in your heart - you are God's possession. Is Jesus being tied up, bound by Satan? Is Satan robbing Jesus of you?

It seems that Satan was robbing Jesus of his own family who wanted to take him away. It seems Satan was robbing Jesus of the support of the religious leaders who should have been on the side of the only Son of God.

*Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."*

The leaders of God's people could not tell the difference between the one sent by God and one sent by Satan.

*31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you."*

Remember why they were coming. People are saying Jesus is out of his mind, his family loves him, they want to shield him.

But Jesus would not turn himself over to them, *“Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers, whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.”*

The house was divided. Jesus declared that he had a new family.

When I read this story I think of how we have domesticated Jesus. We take the Son of God who is like a mountain lion and we turn him into a house cat. The Jesus we worship could never be thought to be possessed by demons. The Jesus we worship would never do anything that would pain his mother.

These stories are a warning to us. A strong man is being bound here, his possessions are being plundered. Before long they will be binding him with ropes and handing him over to Pilate, before long they will be crucifying the only Son of God.

These stories are a warning to us. How Satan would like to bind up Jesus in our hearts. How Satan would like us to think that Jesus is too extreme, too radical, that if we follow him that we might be thought out of our minds. Satan would like us to take Jesus whom we love home with us. And keep him there - out of sight - locked away.

Keep your faith in Jesus a private thing, for you alone. Or let Satan bind up Jesus, divide your own soul so that you will fall to Satan like Peter did when he denied his Lord.

These stories are a warning to us. If Mary who carried Jesus in her own body and Jesus brothers who grew up with him wanted to take him home, what chance do we have? If religious leaders so trained in God's law and God's promises confused the Son of God for one of Satan's own, what chance do we have?

Just this: When Satan had bound Jesus in death, God broke the bindings. At the very moment when Satan thought he had all the possessions of the strong man for his own, God claimed us for himself forever. In Jesus' cross you are made Jesus family, his sister and brothers and mother forever.

Now we are there in his house with him, we are seated in the circle at his feet. *“Here are my mother and my brothers,”* he says of us. We do God's will as we follow Jesus word. The house is divided no more.