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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, it was thought that Jesus was mad, insane, out of his mind.

During Jesus's ministry, it was suspected that Jesus was not right in the head, that he was in fact crazy.

Indeed, this is what we see going on today in our Gospel reading today.

We see people responding to what they believe is a mentally imbalanced Jesus.

The Gospel starts out simply enough with Jesus coming home to Capernaum.

And we hear that there were crowds gathering around Jesus.

So many people had gathered in fact, that Jesus is unable to carve out enough space to eat.

And then we learn that Jesus' family is coming, perhaps to do a sort of intervention.

Jesus' family comes because people were saying Jesus has gone out of his mind.

And furthermore, Scribes even come down from Jerusalem to assess Jesus' mental state.

And the Scribes conclude that Jesus is possessed by Beelzebul, which translates as "Lord of the Flies."

And the Scribes declare that by the ruler of the demons Jesus casts out demons.

But, does that make any sense? Why would the ruler of demons cast out demons?

And Jesus says as much.

Jesus says, "It would be like a kingdom that is divided, or a house that is divided. Neither can stand if there is division within.

So certainly Satan would fall if he indeed opposed his own demons and cast them out, like Jesus has been doing.

Therefore, one must conclude that Jesus is not possessed, that he is not the ruler of demons.

Or, another way to say it, "You can tell a tree by its fruits."

If Jesus performs deeds of power that serve good, that are grace-filled, that bless and heal, then it stands to reason that Jesus is from God, and not the ruler of demons.

Yes, in our lesson today our Lord Jesus was thought to be mad, insane, and out of his mind.

But, I guess that shouldn't surprise us.

I mean Jesus has been going around declaring people forgiven of their sins.

Ahh, but only God can forgive sins.

So, in effect, by declaring people forgiven, Jesus is saying that he is God in the flesh.

And this...this didn't go over well in Jesus' day.

At the least, it would be a sign of madness.

At worst, it would be deemed blasphemous punishable by death.

And, would we be any different today?

If someone were to say that they were God incarnate...

If someone were to declare themselves a god, wouldn't we be just a tad skeptical?

Wouldn't we probably think that this person is not quite right in the head?

And, be mindful that when a clergyman like myself declares the forgiveness of sin, it is not that the clergyman is so presumptuous as to think that they are God.

Certainly, I have no pretense so as to think I am God.

No, the clergyperson declare forgiveness by God's authority.

I say for instance in the absolution, "In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake, God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and BY HIS AUTHORITY, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins..."

It is not by my authority, my doing, that I declare the forgiveness of sins.

No, like any clergyperson, I declare the forgiveness of sins by God's authority.

But Jesus, in his day, was saying, "I forgive you your sins."

Jesus presents himself as God, and this struck people as not right.

This made people believe that Jesus was not himself, that he had in fact gone out of his mind.

But in hindsight, Jesus was who he says he was, even if people in his day thought he was crazy.

PAUSE

Now, in the modern day, C.S. Lewis, of *Chronicles of Narnia* fame, also spoke about the various understandings of Jesus—whether he was a madman, or God, or some great moral teacher.

Lewis notes that some people say that Jesus was nothing but a great moral teacher.

In his book *Mere Christianity*, Lewis wrote these words:

He writes, "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.'"

Lewis goes on, "To say Jesus was [only and simply] a great moral teacher is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said [like I forgive your sins] would not be a great moral teacher."

Lewis says, "Jesus would either be a lunatic—on the level with a man who say he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell."

“You must make your choice,” Lewis says.

“[We must each make our choice.] Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God.”

“But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense,” says Lewis.

“Let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher.”

“He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Again, those are the thoughts of C.S. Lewis on the topic of Jesus’ mental state as depicted in Gospels, and especially as it relates to our gospel reading today.

Either we believe Jesus to be a madman or he is who says he is, that is God’s Son.

PAUSE

Now, sisters and brothers in Christ, as I was thinking about this gospel passage this past week, I got to thinking about our humanity, our human creaturehood, if you will.

And I got to thinking about what it is that maintains our human equilibrium, our human balance, what it is that keeps us in good human mental health.

And I realized that indeed part of the secret to human balance, equilibrium, and human well-being is what Jesus points out to us in this text.

It is this sense of unity or integrity in the self.

The people in this text believed Jesus was not in his right mind.

They believed Jesus was out of balance, that he had gone mad.

That he was in fact the ruler of demons casting out demons.

And Jesus notes that a kingdom divided, that house divided, cannot not stand for long.

And, if we apply this notion to ourselves, to our own personhood, we see just how true that is.

For we have all heard the phrase, "living a double life."

We have all heard about persons who present themselves in one way to their neighbors, or their co-workers, or even their family.

But behind that persona, they are living a secret life.

We have heard about persons who have committed heinous crimes.

And their neighbors say, "He or she was always such a quiet or friendly neighbor."

We have learned about persons who have done unfortunate things, where we think that their outward life just didn't jive with whatever they were caught doing.

And that is the point...

A kingdom divided cannot stand.

A house divided will soon fall.

Think about Adam and Eve from the book of Genesis.

They are God's human creatures, whom God blessed with an idyllic life in the Garden of Eden.

But then, Adam and Eve succumb to the temptation of the serpent.

And as a result, they hide from God.

And they are living a divided life, which catches up with them, when God discovers what they have done.

We are all like that. We all live doubles lives. We all live secret lives.

We may present ourselves as one kind of person out in public.

But we may be an entirely different person when we are at home, when we are behind closed doors, when we think no one is watching us.

I forget who said it, but there is a quote that states, "We are never truly ourselves until we are alone and we think no one is watching."

Even Martin Luther noticed that we live double lives.

Luther described the Christian life as consisting of both saint and sinner.

Inside our beings are two people. The one person loves to sin, while the other struggles to do good—saint and sinner.

It is not unlike those cartoons where we see a character who has a little devil sitting on one shoulder and a little angel sitting on the other, and each is whispering into the opposing ears of the character.

PAUSE

But in light of this dual nature we humans have, this reading from Mark today reminds us that for the health and well-being of our human creaturehood...

This passage reminds us that for balance and equilibrium in our lives, we need to find integrity.

And integrity is one of those words in the English language where its two meanings serve to reinforce each other.

If we look up the word integrity in the dictionary, the one definition we will find is “the state of being undivided or being whole.”

And a second definition is “honesty, or sincerity.”

And it is such that if we practice honesty and sincerity, particularly practicing these principles in private—being honest and sincere with ourselves, then the person we are in private will be the person we are in public, and we will find ourselves to be undivided and whole.

We will find ourselves to be in balance, in equilibrium, and so then it will serve to nurture a healthy mental and spiritual state.

I don't mean to suggest that this is the cure-all for mental illness, by no means. But a quiet mind, an unperturbed mind is certainly supported by living a life of integrity.

PAUSE

And it is in just this way that Jesus was honest and sincere about who he was. He lived a life of integrity.

For him to have gone against his divine nature...

For Jesus to have balked at forgiving sins, and to have refrained from performing healings and miracles...

This would have gone against who he truly was, that is God's Son who was called to enact God's grace in the world.

And whereas those around him thought Jesus was somehow out of kilter, and not in his right mind, Jesus himself knew with certainty that he was being who he was.

Maybe this is what we mean when we say, "Jesus was fully human. That he was in balance. That he showed absolute integrity, and was not in any way divided in himself. Jesus was fully human."

And maybe that is what it means for us to be fully the human creatures God has made us to be.

It is to have integrity—it is to be honest and sincere not only before others but with ourselves as well.

Yes, we will continue to struggle with integrity, for as Luther noted, we are persons who are both saint and sinner.

We have both good and bad inside each of us, but it is that which we choose to act on that truly shows who we are.

PAUSE

Friends, this is then the admonition from our Lord this day.

We are to be honest and sincere with ourselves.

Just as we come before God and confess our sins in this house.

Let us be honest and sincere with ourselves before God when we are in our own house, or wherever we find ourselves in private. Let us be honest and sincere with ourselves.

Let us live a life of integrity that our personhood, this house [point to the body], need not feel the trauma of division.

In Christ, we pray...Amen.