

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today's gospel reading is a little odd. We heard of Beelzebul, Satan, plundering of a strong man's house, and Jesus's confusion about his family. At first pass, it comes across worse than if we dig into what Jesus was trying to communicate. So, let's sort this out.

First, today's snippet comes from Mark's gospel. When we look at the arc of the gospel, this is part where the nature of Jesus is revealed. Up to this point, Jesus had healed a bunch of people, and that was all well and good. Buuuut, the bee in the bonnet of some religious leaders was that Jesus was not observing a specific law that required Jewish followers to refrain from work on the Sabbath. This friction began when Jesus's disciples were oh so hungry on the Sabbath, so they did the "work" of harvesting food to eat. Shortly after, Jesus saw a man with a withered hand and "worked" to heal him, again, on the Sabbath. So, the religious leaders took issue with Jesus ignoring the "right time" to do work. And that's where we picked up today.

The episode began with reports that Jesus was out of his blessed mind. So, Jesus's family tried to reign him in, but that didn't seem to work. Then, the professional interpreters of the law, also known as the scribes, went up to Jesus in verse 22. The scribes knew "the right time" better than anyone else. Based on Jesus's actions, they labeled him Beelzebul, the ruler of demons. And that set Jesus off into a parable.

Now, parables are neither historical accounts nor are they meant to be taken literally. Instead, parables work to describe a new reality, and they provide some kind of image to help the listeners grasp that reality. In this parable, it's the image of a strong man. The strong man is interpreted to be Satan, and let's be clear here, Satan is a term for the personification of evil to show how evil seems to take on a life of its own. In the parable, Jesus entered into the strong man's house, otherwise known as evil's abode. There, Jesus constrains evil so as to ransack the place where evil feels comfortable.

Before Jesus presents this image, Jesus acknowledged the feelings of the scribes. He noted that when evil has become the status quo, it can become harder to recognize the presence of evil. Then, when the status quo does become more just, sometimes we label the act of change evil, even if the nature of the change isn't actually evil. Basically, change can feel uncomfortable, while the content of the change can be just. Throughout Mark's gospel change will be an emphasis. After all, Jesus will reveal that he did not show up to be the expected Savior or anticipated Messiah—that is, the one who would rule with military strength. Rather, Jesus came to be a “suffering servant” to reject violence and pride while emphasizing acts of love and service. So, sure, when Jesus engages in acts of service and love within evil's home, then it will often feel like the “wrong time” and thus, the work can be confused with that of Satan. Does that make sense?

It reminds me in some ways of June 2020. It was a time when the Supreme Court had just released a momentous ruling that the 1964 Civil Rights Act, in fact, protects gay, lesbian, and transgender employees from discrimination based on sex.<sup>1</sup> For the queer community, it was a big deal! I mentioned to a friend that the ELCA, the denomination of this congregation, hadn't said a word about the ruling. She told me that they were probably working on something, so be patient, it takes time. Then, three days later, the Supreme Court made another ruling: this time regarding DACA. In less than 30 minutes, the ELCA made a statement. The ELCA's statement on DACA was an important acknowledgment of our work towards justice. But, still, not a peep about the justice granted to queer people. When I mentioned it to my friend, she said, “Maybe the reason people didn't say anything was because we are

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/15/863498848/supreme-court-delivers-major-victory-to-lgbtq-employees>

acknowledging a very painful situation this week. Caused by a white ELCA member.” I knew she was referring to the heinous crime that killed nine black members at Mother Emanuel in Charleston, South Carolina.

A bit later in the conversation, she gave another reason for the silence when she said, “and think about this exact moment in time.” She was reminding me of the protests, unrest, and national reckoning with white supremacy that had hit a fevered pitch. While it was not said so blatantly, her response was essentially, “Now is not the time for queer people; it’s the time for Black people.” I know she didn’t mean that, and eventually, the ELCA did release a statement, but there’s a truth here we all need to confront.

You see, this mindset is the spawn of Satan and is far too prevalent. By nature, evil is our adversary. Evil backs us into a corner where, as Jesus put it in today’s parable, “the house becomes divided.” You see, instead of acknowledging the oppression, injustice, and silence flung at those on the margins, evil wants us to play oppression Olympics. Evil wants us to believe the racism, nationalism, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination are all siloed. That we can only care about one thing at a time. We’re tricked into believing that there are “right times” to talk about the injustice for queer folks, that there is another “right time” to acknowledge racism, and that there is yet another “right time” to talk about nationalism. But you see, that is what gets us in this screwed up place to begin with.

You see, what Jesus is saying into today’s reading is that it is always the right time to respond to injustice. No matter if it’s the Sabbath or not, it’s the right time to

feed the hungry. Even if we're already talking about heterosexism, it is still the right time to confront racism. No matter if we're on vacation, at work, at school, or at home—it is always the right time to stand up for God's vision of love, justice, and peace for all. Period.

That, my friends, is good news. It's good news to know that God doesn't advocate for the status quo that holds us back. Rather, God's vision for the world is to turn injustice upside down, to make love the primary currency, and to substitute pride for acts of service.

So too, Jesus invites us into this work. We are invited to work together, as a house united. We're invited to embrace the intersectionality of injustice, we're encouraged to cast off the goggles of privilege, and we're empowered to follow in Christ's footsteps of love.

Friends, I know it's warm, and so I'm going to leave us here. Today we are reminded that our God takes "now is not the time" and turns it into "the time is now." It's always the time to respond to injustice. It's always the time to stand up to evil. So today, we're encouraged ponder what that looks like for us. What does it mean for our congregation to recognize that the time is now to work for love, justice, and peace? What does it mean for us to be a house united? Thankfully, we stand firm in the knowledge that evil's home is already being plundered by our God. Now you and I, we, are invited to join in bringing about God's will. For, in that place, we will find Christ's holy family. Amen.