

Mk 3: 20-35

In response to the religious teachers who claimed that Jesus was possessed by a demon, Jesus teaches that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, and that Satan cannot fight against Satan. Then, when his family come asking for him, Jesus declares that all who do God's will are his siblings and parents.

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

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

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

At the centre of this story is Jesus' victory for the kingdom of God, the subversion of the strong man by the stronger one and the freeing of the plunder, God's good creation. We also hear reflections of the community in which the Gospel was first told and read and proclaimed - the ones who in following Jesus had met similar resistance. These, like Jesus and his disciples, may have lost mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers and houses and fields for the sake of the good news (10:28-30) and may have felt themselves under threat from powers and principalities, as he was. For those people, then and through the ages, there is comfort in the turn from restraint and threat to freedom, courage, and hope, even in the face of the ones who would kill Jesus.

COCU42B Readings

This Sunday presents a direct challenge to where we place our allegiance, and to whom do we give our obedience and devotion. In the Samuel reading, which marks the start of the monarchy in Israel, the people reveal their struggle to remain committed to God. In the conversation between God and Samuel, God relates Israel's history of turning away from God, and views this call for a king as just another case of misplaced allegiance and a quest to be like the other nations, instead of living as an alternative community under God's Reign.

In Psalm 138 the attitude is one of praise for God's unfailing love, protection and answer to prayer. No matter what life may throw at us, our faith needs to remain in God. Similarly in the Corinthians reading, Paul describes the troubles that we experience in this life as small compared with the glory which awaits us in Christ. It is this hope that enables us to stay faithful, and to share the message of God's grace, even as we face suffering in this life.

In the Gospel account, Jesus faces persecution of his own, both from his family who call him crazy, and from the religious leaders who claim that he is demonised. His response is decisive though, in two ways. Firstly, he reveals the absurdity in claiming that his power to defeat the devil comes from the devil, which implies that it can only come from God. Secondly, he embraces all who obey God, who give their hearts in allegiance to God's Reign as he has done, as his family.

The message of this week, then, is that life is hard and will bring suffering, especially when we try to live with integrity and faith. However when we keep our allegiance with God we have God's promise that God will sustain us, and we have the hope in the eternal life that God promises us. Finally, in this life, we also have the joy of a family of faith with whom we can share our tears, our joys and our hope, while helping one another to stay faithful to God.

One of the reasons for the injustice in our world is that human beings are constantly being called to give their allegiance to things that do not bring justice, life and equality. While there is more than enough wealth in our world to provide for everyone, we choose rather to give our allegiance to consumerism, materialism, selfish corruption. Where we could find security and peace through collaboration, mutual understanding, creative resource sharing, and acceptance of differences, we prefer to give our allegiance to divisive exclusivity, factionalism, stereotyping, blaming, self-protectiveness, and power games. The list goes on... We must shift our allegiance away from the "kingdoms of this world" to God's Reign.

(Commentary by John van de Laar, Sacredise)

1 Sam 8:4-11(12-15), 16-20 (11:14-15)

The people of Israel demand a king and God concedes, instructing Samuel to tell them how hard it will be to have a king ruling over them. Then Saul is appointed as king.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations." But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; *(and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers).*

He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. 17He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 18And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day." 19But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, "No! but we are determined to have a king over us, 20so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles."

(Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship." So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they sacrificed offerings of well-being before the Lord, and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly)

Psalm 138

Praise and thanksgiving for God's unfailing love, God's promises, God's answers to prayer, and God's protection.

I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name **for your steadfast love and your faithfulness;** for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul. All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.

They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.

For though the Lord is high, God regards the lowly; but the haughty God perceives from far away. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;

you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.

The Lord will fulfil God's purpose for me;

your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever.

Do not forsake the work of your hands.

2 Cor 4:13-5:1

Paul explains his hope and faith in God that compels him to preach, for as God raised Christ, so God will raise all who believe in Christ. This gives us hope and perseverance in the face of the troubles we deal with in this life.

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.