

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, June 9, 2024. Based on Genesis 3 and Mark 3 "Binding the Strong Man".

Title: "The Challenges of Being in the Human Family"

How many of you have family problems? You are not alone. I once heard from a counselor, "The problem with family is... we all have one."

Our lessons today speak to the challenges of being part of the human family. Our first lesson from Genesis 3 shows the fall of the first humans into sin. Our Gospel from Mark 3 shows how even Jesus' own family is divided against him and considers him a deviant. Family problems weigh heavy on our hearts, don't they? And when our families are divided, they fall. But God offers us a counterweight called grace and forgiveness to heal our broken relationships with God and one another.

Speaking of a counterweight. Take cranes for example... you know then ones that lift stuff. I am fascinated with how cranes work. I watched as the red crane named Ruby was set up and at ThedaCare in Neenah for the remodeling. When laid on its side, it practically covered a 1/2 a city block. Multiple trucks carrying sections brought this thing in. I wondered, "how are they going to put this together?" It towered over everything. Cranes, of course, are used to lift heavy materials during building projects. A counterweight that offsets the weight of the load keeps the crane from tipping over. There must be some crazy math that goes into calculating the counterweight.

We too have a counterweight as Christians that keeps us from tipping over from this heavy load called sin. Sin is a condition we all have... we are born into it. We all fall short of the Glory of God daily. The counterweight to sin is the cross of Jesus Christ... and it is perfectly calibrated for each of us. When we confess our sins known and unknown or have a broken heart over what we have done or left undone, God's grace enters in and frees us from the burden. Sin can be defined as anything that separates from loving God and the neighbor. Sin is sometimes defined as being self-centered or turned in on oneself. Sin is when we put our ultimate trust something other than God, like money or power or in ourselves.

For example, in our first lesson from Genesis 3, the second account of creation, the first humans quickly spiral out of control because they disobeyed God's command to not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden. They could eat from any other tree in the garden but not that one. And if they did, God said they would die. The serpent, who was more crafty and any other wild animal, tempted the woman saying, "go ahead, you will be like God knowing good and evil, surely you will not die." So, she took it and ate. And she gave some to the man.

Secumbing to temptation and disobeying God was the original sin. That kicked off a domino effect. The serpent was right. They did not die, but would you agree that our sin when unchecked can spiral us out of control and leave a wake of hurt and pain and even death behind us.

The first humans after eating the forbidden fruit were ashamed of their naked bodies. So they covered them with fig leaves.

When they heard God walking around in the garden, they hid themselves. But Psalm 139 reminds us that there is nowhere we can go outside of God's presence. God said, "Where are you?" The man responded, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." Interestingly, God, doesn't immediately accuse the man but asks, "Who told you that you were naked? God is upset that the whole system of Eden is being broken. God asks, Did you eat the fruit from the tree I told you not to eat from?

Then blame enters the picture... "She gave it to me."

God turns to the woman, she says, "The serpent tricked me."

Nobody is taking responsibility for their own actions. So, God punishes all three of them. God made the serpent slither like a snake on the ground. The woman will experience pain in child-bearing and be ruled by a man (which is the perfect example of patriarchy in the Bible). The man's punishment will have to work the ground all the days of his life for food.

But even in punishment there is a counterweight. God becomes a seamstress and made garments of skin for the man and his wife and clothed them in Genesis 3:21. There is a counterweight between punishment and grace here. The humans still took the consequences, but God never gives up on them and even clothes them before sending them out of the garden.

In our Gospel reading from Mark 3, Jesus had a family... and it was complicated. His family considers him a deviant along with the crowds. Jesus is not acting like the son of a carpenter. Up to this point, Jesus healed a man with an unclean spirit, he cleansed a leper, he healed Peter's mother in law, a paralytic, and a man with a withered hand on the sabbath. Upon returning home, one might think of a joyful homecoming. Well, Jesus' family felt the need to physically restrain him. He was deviating outside the family honor code. Jesus' opponents also considered him a deviant, saying his power comes from an evil spirit called Beelzebul "the prince of demons". That is like name calling or labeling someone. But Jesus knew and we know his power is from God, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove his baptism. By saying he has an evil spirit, when it really is from God, is what Jesus calls blaspheming the Holy Spirit... which is the only unforgiveable sin in the Bible... calling a thing evil that is really from God.

Jesus responds, can evil can't cast out evil? A house divided is not able to stand. Jesus then tells a parable, "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man, and indeed the house can be plundered."

What does it mean? Why is Jesus using a wrestling example.

Well, Jesus has demonstrated his power over the power of evil early in the Gospel. Evil powers cower in his sight. In fact, he has bound the strong man, which could be considered satan or evil, and Jesus will continue to plunder evil in the world. Yoking with Jesus will help us navigate the evil that still exists in the world.

The question for us is, "What strong forces of evil or temptation need to be bound up in your life for Jesus to enter in and plunder you with grace?" There is power in Jesus' name. There is healing with Jesus.

There is forgiveness when we mess up. Satan does not want people to be baptized or go to church to hear the good news of Jesus. He doesn't want you to take communion where there is grace and forgiveness. He doesn't want you to lay your burdens at the foot of the cross. He wants you to go it alone. He wants to deceive you into thinking his way It's ok, go ahead, try it, you will surely not die.

The good news is, even when our human families fall apart, there is room for grace and forgiveness. Not only that, Jesus redefines family as anyone who does the will of God. That means we are family here in church. That means we aren't perfect. But we all are siblings in Christ. Just as God was willing and continues to have grace for us humans, let us also have grace for ourselves and one another. Amen.