

Mark 3: 20-30

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.'

Commentary: Once again Jesus is the subject of misunderstanding and animosity. This time, the issue has to do with his powers of healing and exorcism. Is Jesus' power from God or from the devil? Jesus responds in two ways. First he offers a 'parable.' If his power is directed at healing rather than destroying, how can it be from the devil? But secondly, he declares something much more severe. Mistaking or misnaming the divine for the demonic has eternal consequences. Accusing Jesus of being possessed by the devil rather than the Holy Spirit is the same thing as calling the Holy Spirit evil. This blatant misnaming not only shows how closed minded and hard-hearted the religious leaders are to God as revealed in Jesus; it also shows how closed they are to receiving and experiencing the forgiving and embracing love of God within. God cannot overcome this resistance. Love (God) cannot force itself on another and remain love.

In this season of Covid-19, anxiety and fear are heightened for many more of us. We are also less patient and tolerant with those who are not following the social rules as laid down by the authorities. These are not optional, yet we rely on people choosing to do the right thing. We are all affected by the choices people make, and yet, we can't force people to do what they should when they're on their own. How do we inspire love as a sense of responsibility and social commitment? How do we embrace our individuality while recognizing our interdependence? External pressure and social force through threats and shaming can only go so far. Hearts have to be in the compliance.

Are you closed and hardened in specific areas of your life? Are you keeping God at arm's length in specific situations and relational obligations? It's easy to point the finger at others. Where in our own lives are we resistant to commitment, responsibility and change for the greater good?

Prayer: Lord God, I want to be open to you in every way and in every aspect of my life. Yet I also realize that I can be close-minded and hard-hearted to others, to you and to what the world needs from me most right now. Help me to hear you speaking even in situations and circumstances that are difficult for me to bear. Teach me an openness of spirit and an openness to your love. Amen.