

**Gospel & Sermon June 9, 2024**  
**Third Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone**  
**“There’s no restraining Jesus.”**



*The gospel of Mark opens up in dangerous territory today, as “good” looks like “evil” to some. Jesus seems frantic to his family and disciples, as they watch him deal with the huge crowds he attracts. They want to quiet him down, maybe get him to rest, to stop what he’s doing, to dial it back. Jesus has other ideas.*

**Gospel: Mark 3:20-35**

Jesus went home; and the crowd came together again, so that Jesus and the disciples 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 Beelzebub, 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.”

**Sermon by Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone**  
**“There’s no restraining Jesus.”**

Jesus’ family members are just beside themselves. Can you hear them, worrying out loud as they tromp down the dirt roads to retrieve him:

What is going on with Jesus? This call to ministry has gone to his head. The other day he was climbing up a mountain like he thinks he’s Moses, or something.

Look who he’s hanging out with. I heard the Pharisees and Herodians are out to get him.

We knew Jesus was different, but this is not what we expected. We need to get to him - and fast - for his own good.

We need to protect him.

By now Jesus has drawn crowds from every direction: north, south, east, and west. Jews and Gentiles alike. They all want to experience his healing power. They all want to experience the welcome he extends to the wounded, the weary, and the outcast. And Jesus’ family comes to restrain him, Mark tells us.

Don’t we sometimes wish to restrain Jesus, too? Like when he calls us to serve in ways that seem impossible, or just more risky and complicated than we prefer. Like when he sends us prophets who challenge our favorite interpretations of scripture. Like when he welcomes people who make us uncomfortable: Lepers or tax collectors. Or Democrats or Republicans. People with mental illnesses we don’t understand. People with accents we don’t understand. People in the LGBTQ community. People who use different words for the Lord’s Prayer.

When Jesus starts doing stuff like that, we might want to restrain him, too. In some ways, we want to protect him, just like his family did. We want to protect Jesus' reputation. We want to protect the church and its status. We want to defend God and God's ways.

A few chapters down the road in Mark's gospel, we'll see the disciples try to protect Jesus, too. When Jesus begins to teach his disciples about the suffering, rejection, and death that his future holds, Peter pulls Jesus aside to rebuke him: That cannot happen. We are not going to let that happen. And you remember what Jesus says? "Get behind me, Satan!"

Later, the disciples will try to project Jesus from the crowds of families bringing their children to him for a healing touch. And you remember what Jesus says to those disciples? "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them."

Jesus doesn't seem to want his family's protection. He doesn't seem to want his disciples' protection. Maybe he doesn't even want our protection. And maybe that's because Jesus doesn't need our protection.

Jesus doesn't ask us to protect or defend him. Jesus calls us to follow him. We follow the One with the power to defeat death and bind up the ruler of demons. Does someone so powerful need our protection?

Sometimes, our efforts to protect Jesus double as efforts to protect ourselves, our traditions, our comfort, and our reputations. Maybe that's part of what Jesus' family members are doing. Surely the neighbors are gossiping behind their backs. Maybe people are telling them to get Jesus under control before things go sideways. Everyone knows that Rome fears crowds like the ones Jesus is drawing. And everyone knows that Rome doesn't hesitate to violently crush crowds like the ones Jesus is drawing. That's not good for anyone: Not Jesus, not his family and neighbors, not anyone who wants to keep practicing their faith in peace.

So Jesus' family comes to restrain him. And he rejects their efforts.

Maybe our well-intentioned efforts to protect and defend Jesus are actually ill-fated means of restraining him, of binding him. That's the problem with the religious leaders. Now, following the guidance of our Small Catechism, I'm going to try to interpret their actions in the best possible light. I'm going to assume they are sincere.

They, too, are trying to protect their faith traditions, to protect their vulnerable community from Rome's violence. They are trying to protect God and God's ways. And in doing so, they end up mistaking good for evil.

These leaders hear about Jesus casting out demons, curing diseases, granting forgiveness, and restoring people to full welcome and participation in the community. And they say: There must be something evil going on here.

They see all this wild, out-of-control, boundary-breaking goodness, and they assume its source is evil. It's not coming from the religious establishment. So it must be coming from Satan.

This is the sin Jesus charges them with: mistaking good for evil.

And the charge comes with a warning. If you keep attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to an evil spirit, eventually you will not even be able to recognize God's goodness, God's mercy and forgiveness. If you label God's redeeming power as evil long enough, you will eventually fall for your own story - and you'll reject that redeeming power altogether.

You will never have forgiveness, because you won't even want it. That is the eternal sin Jesus is talking about.

Jesus is not rejecting or condemning anyone. He's telling the religious leaders the truth about their behavior - and warning them about where that behavior will ultimately lead.

Jesus is not rejecting his family. He is broadening the definition of family and expanding membership to anyone who does the will of God - even those people we might want to protect Jesus from.

And that's going to make it really hard for anyone who wants to be a gatekeeper for Jesus. He is just going to keep welcoming people: Not the morally perfect or the perfectly pious, but the ones desperate for belonging. The ones who have been bound up by demons or poverty or the harsh judgment of their neighbors.

And Jesus comes to plunder that whole system that is keeping people bound up.

He starts with binding up Satan. However you imagine Satan - as a supernatural being, as some ultimate evil force holding the world captive, as evil embodied in humans or animating demons - however you imagine Satan, Jesus comes to bind up Satan so that all of God's people may be freed.

A savior that powerful will not abide our efforts to restrain him. A savior that powerful does not need our protection. But he welcomes our participation. The One who binds up the strong man is at work in the world still today plundering the strong man's home. Jesus is at work plundering the world of every form of evil, of every condition or circumstance that keeps God's beloveds bound.

And he calls us to join without restraint in that mission - the mission of love, healing, forgiveness, and welcome. The mission of freeing people - you and me and everyone - from all that binds us.

*Pastor Jaime*

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