

Introduction

A house divided against itself cannot stand. Jesus makes this observation in light of charges that he is possessed. He is possessed, not by a demon, but by the Holy Spirit. We who have received the Holy Spirit through baptism have been joined to Christ's death and resurrection and knit together in the body of Christ. Those with whom we sing and pray this day are Jesus' family. With them we go forth in peace to do the will of God.

Prayer of the Day

God of all, in Jesus Christ you turned death into life and defeat into victory. Increase our faith and trust in him, that we may triumph over all evil in the strength of the same Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: 1 Samuel 8:4-11 [12-15] 16-20 [11:14-15]

God has settled the Israelites in the promised land and has appointed judges to govern them. But they want to be like the nations around them. By asking Samuel for a human king, they reject the kingship of God and open themselves to oppression at the hands of the human king.

⁴All the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, ⁵and 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." ⁶But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the LORD, ⁷and 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. ⁸Just 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. ⁹Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

¹⁰So Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹He 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; [¹²and 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. ¹³He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and

bakers. ¹⁴He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. ¹⁵He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers.] ¹⁶He 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.” [¹⁴Samuel said to the people, “Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship.” ¹⁵So 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

¹I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with | my whole heart;
before the gods I will | sing your praise.

²**I will bow down toward your holy temple and praise your name, because of your
steadfast | love and faithfulness;
for you have glorified your name and your word a- | bove all things.**

³When I called, you | answered me;
you increased my | strength within me.

⁴**All the rulers of the earth will praise | you, O LORD,
when they have heard the words | of your mouth.**

⁵They will sing of the ways | of the LORD,
that great is the glory | of the LORD.

⁶**The LORD is high, yet cares | for the lowly,
perceiving the haughty | from afar.**

⁷Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you | keep me safe;
you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies; your right | hand shall save
me.

⁸**You will make good your pur- | pose for me;
O LORD, your steadfast love endures forever; do not abandon the works | of your
hands.**

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:13--5:1

Life in the present is transitory and cannot compare with the eternal home God has prepared for us. So we do not despair no matter what life might bring because we know that as God raised Jesus from the dead, God promises to bring us into eternal life.

¹³Just 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, ¹⁴because 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. ¹⁵Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because 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.

^{5:1}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.

Gospel Reading: Mark 3:20-35

In response to charges that he is possessed, Jesus wonders aloud how anyone who is demon-possessed can cast out demons. Those who do the will of God are possessed by the Holy Spirit, siblings of Christ.

[Jesus went home;] ²⁰and the crowd came together again, so that [Jesus and the disciples] 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."

³¹Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." ³³And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Prayers of Intercession

Let us come before the triune God in prayer, saying “God, in your mercy,” and responding, “hear our prayer.”

A brief silence.

God of wholeness, we pray for believers all over the globe, including our companion synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. Unify us in service of the gospel, that we may work together as beloved siblings to share your love with all. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of the cosmos, we pray for creation; the gardens, waterways and creatures near to us and diverse forms of life that remain unseen. Teach us to treat the natural world with reverence, seeking restoration when human divisions have caused harm to your beloved creation. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of all people, we pray for harmony among the nations. Cast out from us unclean spirits of greed and fear, that we may work in solidarity with one another for the common good. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of abundance, we pray for those who are oppressed or in any need. Encourage those who have begun to lose heart. Strengthen and renew us with your Spirit. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of righteousness, we pray for this holy house of worship. Set our gaze upon things eternal, that in thanksgiving for your mercy, we may extend grace to more and more people. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of the ages, in your goodness you have sent us faithful witnesses for every time and place. We give you thanks for those saints who now rest in your eternal mercy (*especially*). God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your abiding grace.

Amen.

A reflection for the Second Sunday after Pentecost...

Baptismal Water Is Thicker than Blood

Many, perhaps most, subcultures in North America affirm the belief that “blood is thicker than water.” Even when our commitment to family is too often served through hand-wringing sentiment over the so-called decline of the family or pandered to by politicians seeking to prove their “family values” credentials, we like to think of ourselves as loyal to our own kin. Family comes first! In the gospel, Jesus sharply, alarmingly, contradicts the norm; he snubs his nuclear family, his blood.

We discover that Jesus’ family is not defined by objective or biological categories—DNA tests, adoption records, or custody papers—but rather by *function*: Jesus’ family consists of those whom God has called into mission and are engaged in that mission.

Bringing a child of God from birth to maturity of faith requires many things, among them food, shelter, new birth, story, discipline, catechism, and an enduring hope in the one who raised Jesus from the dead. It is a joy to be celebrated when these gifts are provided by those who live in one’s own household—parents, grandparents, extended families. But Jesus reminds us (with an echo from Paul) that even when those nearest to us thwart God’s purposes, we “do not lose heart” but trust that God will call and create a household “not made with hands,” where God’s purposes for us will be nurtured and we will become like the one who “does the will of God.”

There is a strong challenge here to Christian communities to keep their focus on the mission of God and not be tempted to confuse God’s mission with what’s “best” for nations or communities or (even) nuclear families.

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