

# *“Putting the Pieces Back Together”*

**Mark 3:20-35**

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From the Pulpit

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Prayer for Illumination: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our Rock and our Salvation. Amen.

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Jesus has it coming at him from all sides. Fasten your seatbelts and hold onto your hats because we are back in the Gospel of Mark and its author wastes no time telling us what is going on in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine. You may remember the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee when he proclaims in Mark Chapter 1, (verses 14-15): “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the Good News.”

In today’s text, not only are the religious elites saying Jesus is possessed by Satan, his own family thinks he is out of his mind. The crowd is so boisterous, big and needy that eating in Jesus’ own home isn’t an option. Jesus’ family tries to restrain him. The scribes say Jesus is ruled by the ruler of demons.

As if family relationships weren’t hard enough, Jesus calls into question the relationship of his family, who is on the outside and who is on the inside (a huge theme in the gospel of Mark). Saying that those who do the will of God are his family.

There is a lot going on here in this story positioned between Jesus' appointment of the twelve and the familiar parable of the sower. The story reveals a great deal about who Jesus is and what he has come to earth to do. Jesus declares who is kin to him and is explicit that he has come to bring about a whole new order of connections, loyalty and power.

From the beginning of his ministry in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus has been dealing with divided houses and kingdoms. In just three short chapters, he has already cast out demons, healed Peter's mother-in-law, cleansed a leper, and caused a paralytic to walk.

The houses and kingdoms of the people Jesus encounters are divided. Their lives were not their own. They live with inner conflict and turmoil. They have been separated from their community and all that gave them security and identity. Their outer conditions of illness, paralysis, and possession point to the inner conflict, the battle, between health and disease, not just physically but spiritually.<sup>1</sup>

Demons caused all sorts of problems in the days Jesus walked the earth. They broke through human mental and physical defenses. Like thieves in the night they stole in and inhabited the human psyche. Then they drained all the human strength and personality they could find.... They took away the precious thing a person has – his or her self. Some of the demons went crazy. Others went violent or gravely ill. Some even died.

Dr. Brian Blount, New Testament scholar and President of Union Presbyterian Seminary, says, "It is no wonder that exorcists of Jesus' day were in such high demand. In first century Palestine there was a bull market on madness. That is one of the reasons Jesus is so

popular in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus is “an exorcist extraordinaire.”<sup>2</sup>  
[end-quote]

The battle and interior conflict has been around for centuries. When Adam and Eve separated themselves from God and hid among the trees of the garden. When Israel wanted a king so it can be like other nations; forgetting that it has a unique calling, to be different from other nations, that it is through the people, that God will act for the benefit of all people.

This division and inner conflict is a reality of today’s world and our lives.

A marriage divided moves toward divorce.

A nation divided results in vitriolic politics and the extreme, civil war.

An economy divided yields poverty and injustice.

A community divided becomes individualism and tribalism, prejudice and violence.

Humanity divided is all these things on a global level.<sup>3</sup>

We all know what it’s like to live divided lives.

When your insides don’t match up with your outsides.

You are one person at work/school and another at home.

You act one way with certain people and a different way with others.

Life gets divided. Pretty soon, we are left with a bunch of pieces of our life. It seems that we are forever trying to put the pieces of our lives together.

That's why the crowd has gathered around Jesus.

That's why the religious leaders oppose him.

That's why his family tries to restrain him.

In their own way each is trying to put the pieces of their life together – but they are struggling to do it. Their life and their world are neither what they thought they were nor what Jesus knows they can be. One reality is falling and a new one is ready to rise.

Jesus offers a different image of what life might look like. He reveals the division in our lives, the houses that can't stand, the crumbling of our kingdoms. The established rule for who is in and who is out don't apply any more. Jesus comes to bind up the forces of evil and take over the house and all that is within it. Those who join him in fulfilling this divine mission – they are his family, biological or not. Those who don't, remain outsiders.

Don't you think Jesus is a little offensive, too pushy?

He rebuffs his family.

He thumbs his nose at those in religious leadership.

He compares himself to one who breaks into someone's home, ties the owner up and steals.

He offends those closest to him.

Those with the greatest power to hurt him and even, I suspect, some in the crowd too.

He comes to make clear that our loyalty to God trumps all other loyalties, including the ones we long held sacred.

He tells the nice respected revered religious leaders that they are not only misguided, they are instruments of evil.

Jesus is offensive! He's offensive because he refuses to go along and to get along, to bow down to long-expected norms, to allow cultural or familial expectations to thwart his own mission of binding up the broken hearted and liberating those long held captive.

Sometimes, we don't want Jesus to cause offense, or ruffle any feathers, but that's not what Jesus does. He upends everything we've thought to be sacred: family, religion, civility, established order, home, church, country. Jesus calls us to give up all the loyalties that in comparison to God should be penultimate, but in practice become working idols that drive our decisions, thoughts and actions.

Things like: Anger and resentment, greed, insecurity, perfectionism, sorrow and loss. Fear. Envy. Guilt. Loneliness.

There are all sorts of forces, things, events, sometimes even people by which our lives are broken and through which we are separated from God, others and our self.

The leper-touching, demon-tossing, scribe-deflating Jesus challenges all our expectations about how God's Messiah is supposed to behave. In the process he can be an embarrassment, even to those of us who claim to love him. We can wrestle with him, argue with him, struggle to understand him, and even pretend not to know him. The one thing we cannot do is confuse him with Satan.

In a moment, we'll come to the table for the sacrament of communion. A place where those who are broken in body, mind or spirit find wholeness again. A place where the families divided by old or new hurts find healing. The fragment of bread that brings nourishment to our sin-sick souls. The cup of blessing which

reminds us that we are never too far away that the God of love and compassion cannot find us.

For those of you who have been hurt by a church of your past, for who you are or what you believe or who you love –

may you know that the God of love and forgiveness offers a rainbow of hope

and finds you here

at the table of grace---and makes all things new.

Today and always, Jesus is stronger than any of the fragments our lives seem to be in these days. He binds up the forces that divide, he heals the wounds that separate, and refashions pieces into something new and wonderful. There is nothing about your life or mine that cannot be put back together with the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Marsh, [www.interruptingthesilence.com](http://www.interruptingthesilence.com) Sermon illustration and ideas from his blog.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Dr. Brian Blount, 'The Exorcist', Duke Divinity School sermon, 2009. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/brian-blounts-sermon-exorcist/id420553555?i=1000091320325&mt=2>

<sup>3</sup> Michael Marsh, [www.interruptingthesilence.com](http://www.interruptingthesilence.com).

