

SESSION 5: BINDING THE STRONG MAN

COMMIT - DAY 1: "TO DO GOOD OR TO DO HARM"

Most of us are familiar with the idea of the Sabbath as a day of rest. In the first chapters of Genesis after the six days of creation, God blesses the seventh day and rest from his work. This Sabbath rest becomes part of Israel's covenant law after the Exodus, when God commands the Israelites to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship. **Read Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15.** Consider the reasons God give for requiring the Israelites to observe the Sabbath. Based on these passages, how would you describe the purpose of the Sabbath?

The Jews had very strict laws concerning the Sabbath. Under the Mosaic Law, this was a matter of life and death: breaking the Sabbath was a capital crime. In Jesus's day, the Jews had no authority to execute criminals, but keeping the Sabbath was a crucial part of Jewish identity.

This understanding of the Sabbath sets the stage for the scene in Mark 3:1-6. The Pharisees are eager to see if Jesus will heal on the Sabbath so that they can accuse him of working and breaking God's Law. This (so they think) will cause Jesus to lose his authority and esteem in the eyes of the people. After all, no true prophet sent from God would disregard the holiness of the Sabbath!

But the Pharisees seem to have forgotten their history. In their impatience to trap Jesus, they ignore a definitive precedent for interpreting the Sabbath laws set during the time of the Maccabean revolt, not quite 200 years earlier. Jesus reminds the Pharisees of this precedent and evades their trap when he asks them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4).

In 175 BC, a Greek king named Antiochus Epiphanes came into power. He initiated a terrible persecution of the Jews. He plundered and desecrated the Temple and occupied Jerusalem. Under the guise of unity, he requires all the people of his kingdom to forsake their own customs and adopt Greek culture and religion, hunting down and executing those who did not comply (see 1 Maccabees 1:41-64). After listing the horrors suffered by God's people at the hand of the Greek king, the writer of 1 Maccabees concludes with a tribute to the martyrs of the period: "But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die" (1 Maccabees 1:62-63).

Read 1 Maccabees 3:29-38. How does this group of men, women, and children show their faithfulness to God?

The radical love and fidelity these people show for God and his Law is inspiring. But after watching these men, women, and children be cut down on the Sabbath, others in the Jewish resistance, led by faithful pries Mattathias and his sons, determine that fighting to defent themselves, that is fighting in order to preserve life "against every man who comes to attack us," does not constitute a violation of the Sabbath (see 1 Maccabees 2:39-41).

These events from the background for the question Jesus puts to the Pharisees.

COMMIT - DAY 2: HEALING A WITHERED HAND

Jesus’s public ministry is filled with miraculous healings p he makes the blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, and the lame walk. In addition to the individual blessing of healing, these miracles are one of the marks that identify Jesus as the Messiah (see the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 35:1-10). Like Jesus’s many other miracles, the healing in Mark 3:1-6 reveals his messianic mission.

Let’s gather and organize the details of this particular miracle to explore its deeper significance. Read Mark 2:1; 3:1-6 to discover the *who/what/when/where* of this miracle.

Who	
What	
When	
Where	

These details echo a defining moment of sin and rebellion in Israel’s history, as related in 1 Kings 12-13. During the reigns of David and his son Solomon, Israel enjoys a golden age of prosperity and power. But as the years go on, Solomon taxes his people. Solomon’s son Rehoboam refuses to listen to the complaints of the people and instead promises to be an even harsher ruler than his father. As a result ten of the twelve tribes secede and set up their own Northern Kingdom of Israel under the rule of a man named Jeroboam. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remain faithful to their heir of the house of David in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

God allows this political division as a punishment for the sins of Solomon (see 1 Kings 11:19-13), but Jeroboam takes matters too far. Jeroboam doesn’t want his new subjects to return to the Southern Kingdom to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. He is afraid that if the people travel to Jerusalem to worship, their hearts will turn back to the house of David, and he will lose their allegiance. To prevent this, he sets up two golden calves in the Northern Kingdom as centers of worship, so the people won’t have to travel to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices. He even creates a new priesthood and a new liturgical calendar, to further separate the Northern Kingdom from the Southern.

God sends a prophet from the Southern Kingdom of Judah to Jeroboam to call him to task for his religious rebellion. Read 1 King 12:32-13:6. What similarities do you see between this passage and Mark 3:1-6?

At the prayer of the prophet, Jeroboam’s hand is healed. But he did not fully repent of his rebellion, and he did not lead the Northern Kingdom back to faithful worship of the one true God at the Temple in Jerusalem. The precedent of disobedience and idolatry set by Jeroboam spiraled out of control over the next two centuries. As a result of their unfaithfulness, the Northern Kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC, and the ten tribes were scattered and mixed with pagan nations.

Jesus enters the synagogue at Capernaum on the Sabbath. When he heals the man with the withered hand, he is not only blessing an individual and restoring him to health (although the love and compassion Jesus shows for the suffering is certainly a crucial point of his miracles). This miracle is also a prophetic action for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see: Jesus, the new Son of David, the new Davidic King, is restoring the Twelve Tribes of Israel. He will heal the division begun almost 1,000 years earlier Most importantly, he will lead the people in right worship of God.

COMMIT - DAY 3: LECTIO: JESUS APPOINTS THE TWELVE

Jesus ministry attracted a lot of attention. Many people began following Jesus, perhaps because of the miracles they witnessed, the teaching they heard, or the hope they found in him. From these many followers, Jesus called twelve men to a particular ministry as Apostles. Saint Mark gives us some key insights into what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Apostle – from the Greek *apostolos*, meaning “messenger”
Disciple – from the Latin *discipulus*, meaning “student”

LECTIO: The practice of praying with Scripture begins with an active and close reading of the Scripture passage. Read the verse below and then answer the questions to take a closer look at some of the details of the passage.

“And he went up on the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons: Simon whom he surnamed Peter; James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, whom he surnamed Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder; Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. Then he went home.”
- Mark 3:13 – 19 –

Where does this event take place?

What verb(s) describe Jesus’s action? What verb(s) describe the action of the Twelve?

What are the Twelve appointed to do?

MEDITATIO: *Lectio*, a close reading and rereading is followed by *meditation*, a time to reflect on the Scripture passage and to ponder the reasons for particular events, descriptions, details, phrases, and even echoes from other Scripture passages that were noticed during *lectio*. Take some time now to meditate on the above verse.

The secure foundation of every disciple’s life is your relationship with each Person of the Trinity. Knowing in your heart that you are first loved by God and made for God is essential. This relationship leads the disciple to understand in your heart that you are a beloved son, a beloved daughter of the Father. Your love for Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit and your love for his Church is what must impel you to good works, and not the other way around. As St. Paul wrote to the Christians of Corinth, “the love of Christ impels us.” Without our love for Christ and his grace moving us, our own will power will soon fail. When we encounter difficult circumstances, the power of an idea sustains much less than the enduring tenacity of love. Think, for example, of the Blessed Mother at

the foot of the cross. Her trust in God and her love for him allowed her to persevere through the greatest loss imaginable and the greatest challenge to her faith in the words of St. John Paul II. The foundation for discipleship is living one's life in the heart of the Trinity, in communion with each Person of the Trinity.

- Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila, *Discipleship Beyond the First Encounter*, - Address on February 9, 21017, (emphasis in original)

In the Old Testament, there are several key times God appears to his people on a mountain. For example, in the Book of Exodus, God appears to Moses in the burning bush on a mountain to Moses to deliver his people from slavery. How do you think the Twelve felt when Jesus took them "up the mountain" with him?

ORATIO, CONTEMPLATIO, RESOLUTIO: Having read and meditates on today's Scripture passage, take some time to pray – bringing your thoughts to God (*oratio*) – and to be receptive to God's grace in silence (*contemplation*). Then end your prayer by making a simple concrete resolution (*resolution*) to respond to God's prompting of you heart in today's prayer.

COMMIT - DAY 4: BINDING THE STRONG MAN

It must have been exhausting to one of Jesus's disciples. Consider what Mark tells us about Jesus's return to Capernaum after he calls the Twelve: "Then he went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat" (Mark 3:19-20). And in addition to the demands of the crowd, Jesus faces the accusations of those who refuse to believe in him.

Jesus has already had several confrontations with the religious leaders in Galilee, but now authorities from Jerusalem come to investigate him. These scribes are experts in the Mosaic Law, but they completely miss what Jesus's miracles reveal about his identity. Instead of recognizing his power and authority for what it is – divine – they come to a chilling conclusion: "He is possessed by Beelzebub, and by the prince of demons he cast out the demons" (Mark 3:22). The scribes aren't pulling any punches with this extreme accusation.

Jesus responds by summoning the scribes (and notice that they come when he calls, even though they just said he's working for the devil) and pointing out to them the complete lack of logice in new understanding by speaking to them in parables.

These parables make good sense even on a simply human level. Why would Jesus be casting out demons if he were on their side" As Jesus says, "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand" (Mark 3:24). This statement would certainly have resonated with his listeners: religious authorities from the remnant of the Southern Kingdom of Judah standing in the territory of the former Northern Kingdom of Israel. Their own history of a divides kingdom conquered by other nations testifies the logic of Jesus's statement. And no one is likely to argue with the claim that someone would have to be stronger than Satan to wrest dominion away from him.

But the words of Jesus have an even deeper significance when we read them against the backdrop of the prophet Isaiah. Read Mark 3:22-27. Then read Isaiah 49, paying special attention to verses 24-26. What promise does God make through the prophet Isaiah? How is that related to what Jesus is doing in his ministry?

There are many mighty tyrants in Israel's history. But the most dangerous enemy of God's people is Satan, and the worst slavery is that of sin. The devil plunders God's people when they stray from God's protection, and he takes possession of people-literally, in some cases, but also in a certain sense by trapping in sin.

But as Jesus proclaims through his parables to the scribes, he is mightier than the diabolical strong man. And Jesus has come to bind Satan and plunder his possessions, freeing us from the oppression of sin and evil.

Jesus continues this rescue mission in his encounter with the Gerasene demonic. Read Mark 5:1-13. How does it support the claims Jesus makes in Mark 3:22-30?

"We must have a real living determination to reach holiness. I will be a saint means I will despoil myself of all that is not God; I will strip my heart of all created things; I will live in poverty and detachment; I will renounce my will, my inclinations, my whims and fancies, and make myself a willing slave to the will of God." - Saint Teresa of Calcutta

COMMIT - DAY 5: TRUTH AND BEAUTY



Icon of Jesus the Teacher

After Jesus's baptism by John the Baptist and his calling of the Twelve Apostles, Mark recounts, Jesus "went into Capernaum; and immediately on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught" (Mark 1:21). While Mark doesn't give us the long-detailed accounts of Jesus's teaching like Matthew does in his Gospel, he does recount Jesus teaching numerous times: in the Capernaum synagogue (see Mark 1:21-22), by the Sea of Galilee (see Mark 2:13), from a boat on the sea (see Mark 4:2), in Judea beyond the Jordan (see Mark 10:1) and at the Temple in Jerusalem (see Mark 11:15-17).

As the crowds gather around Jesus, Mark describes Jesus teaching them "again, as his custom was" (Mark 10:1). Matthew recounts Jesus "went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 9:35). When addressing the crowd that comes with clubs and swords to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest him, Jesus reminds them saying, "Day after day I sat in the temple teaching" (Matthew 26:55).

In the Gospels, Jesus is often referred to as "Teacher" – by his Apostles, the people and crowds who follow him, even at times by the Sadducees, scribes, and Pharisees, and as "*Rab-bo'-ni!*" (which means Teacher) by Mary Magdalene when she encounters the risen Lord.

Look up the following passages. How was Jesus's teaching described?

Matthew 22:16 _____

Luke 2:46-47 _____

Mark 1:22 _____

Whit teaching such a key part of Jesus's ministry, Jesus "the Teacher" became an image for Christian icons, like the one for today's meditation. The purpose of icons is not for decoration, but rather for prayer and teaching. Icons are "windows to heaven," raising the soul and the mind of the viewer heavenward. For this reason, icons use particular styles, devices, and features, with only slight variations of the iconographer. (*Remark by Sr. Pia – I couldn't find online the exact icon Tim Gray uses, but this is the closest as I could find – sorry.*)

In the icon of Jesus the Teacher, Jesus holds an open book of the Scriptures in his left hand. On the open page is inscribed a verse from the New Testament, often written in Greek, typically either a verse identifying Jesus, such as "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12) or a verse of Jesus's sayings, such as "come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:18).



Jesus' right hand is extended in blessing. But his fingers are set in a unique position that identifies him and is related to the letters "IC" and "XC" that can be found in different icons left and right on the icon. ICXC is a Christogram (a combination of letters that forms an abbreviation for the name of Jesus Christ. The placement of Jesus's fingers, as well as spelling out ICXC, also confesses the Trinity (three fingers in proximity) and the Incarnation, in which are joined Jesus's divine and human natures (two fingers touching).

Around Jesus's head is a halo. But unlike the simple golden halo portrayed around the head of saints or angels, Christ's halo has three arms of the Cross. The Cross of Christ decorated with jewels was a popular image in early Christian and medieval art, illustrating the transformation of the Cross from a vehicle of execution to the throne from which Jesus triumphs and which becomes the Tree of Life for believers. Just as a king's crowns and thrones were decorated with gold and jewels in the arms of the cruciform halo are the Greek letter "O ω N (*omicron, omega, nu*) identifying Jesus as "He Who Is" (*him who is, and who was, and who is to come*) (*Revelation 1:4*).

Jesus is typically clothed in a tunic, over which is wrapped a robe/cloak, each of which is shown in a different color. Red or similar color, symbolizes Jesus's divinity, while the top robe/cloak, often in blue or green, symbolizes Jesus's humanity, which clothed his divinity at the incarnation.

The icon of Jesus the Teacher, Jesus, the Word of God, looks directly out at the viewer, as if to speak directly to our heart the words of God written on the open book he holds. He who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life," desires to be our Teacher also, to teach us his way, the narrow road that leads to eternal life. He waits for our response.