

*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."*

*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.*

I remember my father stumbling over words. He was the Sunday School Superintendent in our little church; each Sunday he led the opening responsive reading for the whole Sunday School, children and adults. Most every week, it seemed to me, a word or two would cause him trouble. I remember being embarrassed by that.

He was my father, we were family. What he did reflected on me.

It was bad enough when I had to read out loud at school. I did whatever I could to avoid it. I stumbled over words. I was embarrassed.

But at church the stumbling happened not just in front of a group of kids, but before all the most important people in our world. I wished someone else would read other than my father.

*Then Jesus went home; and the crowd came together again so that they 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."*

He was family. They were embarrassed by what people were saying about Jesus, thinking about him. They went out to restrain him, just as I would have restrained my father from doing what embarrassed me.

Well, that is not all people were saying about Jesus. Some were saying that Jesus was possessed by the prince of demons, Beelzebul - that Jesus was able to cast out demons through demonic power.

Jesus answered that charge with these words: *“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 is not able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come.”*

What they were saying of Jesus made no sense. Satan would not be attacking Satan. Indeed, if Satan was divided, fighting against himself then Satan was through.

But of course, Satan was not through. Evil was not about to pack up the tents and go home. Evil is like water in a heavy rain, leaking through wherever there is even the smallest crack.

Then Jesus said, *“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.”*

And what is it that Jesus' family was coming to do that day? To restrain him?

*Then his mother and his brothers came; 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 are outside asking for you." And Jesus 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."*

His family is outside the house, wanting to restrain him. Jesus named a new family for himself, those who would sit around him and hear his word.

A house divided against itself cannot stand. It was not Satan's house that was divided but Jesus' own family.

And later the very rulers of Israel who said Jesus' power was from Satan would literally tie up Jesus and hand him over to Pilate, representative of the pagan Romans. Jesus was the strong man that would be tied up so that what was his house might be plundered.

Throughout Jesus' ministry Satan could not withstand Jesus' power. But his own family, his own people tied him up.

Has anything changed? If some enemy came in here and wanted to tie up Jesus' word, seal up the scriptures so that we could no longer hear and read them, we would rise up to

oppose them. Yet what happens among us? Are we immersed in the word, sitting at our Lord's feet, daily hearing what he teaches? Or do you and I bind up this word with our indifference to it, gathering maybe once a month to study the word? Or not at all?

*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.*

This house belongs to Jesus, each of your houses belong to Jesus. But if Jesus is restrained by our indifference, tied up because we do not want to be embarrassed by too obviously following him, then what belongs to Jesus will be plundered by evil.

But there is another way to read this little parable of the strong man. What if Jesus is the one breaking into every place that is claimed by evil? Then whose house will be plundered?

What if we as a family of Jesus would gather every week to hear his word, and then go out to tie up evil? That is what Jesus did. In teaching and healing and touching Jesus claimed lives for God.

Jesus is doing that still.

Dick Sering, director of Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry, told of Jesus' victory in this way.

He attended a banquet celebrating the Community Re-Entry program. For many years men and women who are coming out of prison are hired to protect the poorest of the poor in Cleveland. These ex-offenders are given red coats to identify them as they help the elderly and the young. With joy Dick Sering told us of this banquet, how in the crowd that day the colors were red and blue. The red was clear to me, the red coats, but I did not understand the blue until he explained - police officers. Once enemies, police and criminal, now sisters and brothers gathered to eat and celebrate together.

Evil tied up, reconciliation, a new beginning.

I think of Jesus' family. After Jesus was raised from the dead his brother James was the first head of the church in Jerusalem - his mother, Mary, honored more than any other woman. Though Jesus was tied up in death, God freed him to gather his family once more.

Today is no day to look back, to fret over our failings. Today is the day that God raises us out of our sin, gathers us to feed us, and sends us out to tie up evil. If Jesus can bring police and ex-offenders together in feasting, who knows what Jesus can accomplish through you.

New hope for relationships you thought dead and buried? New love where your heart had grown hard and dry?

Who will be tied up and robbed this week?

Jesus? or Satan?

Who will you be embarrassed to be associated with?

At whose feet will you be sitting?