

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Mark 3:20-30 [MW18-20]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 10 June 2018

Imagine the scene ...

- a typical flat roofed, mud-walled middle eastern house with neighbouring houses very close on either side
- but this house is full, not just crowded but overflowing there are people jostling on the doorstep, hanging out the windows clambering on the roof ... OSH would have a field day!
- there were just so many people those that were outside were trying to get in, or at least close enough to see or even just hear this Jesus
- so many people pressing in that Jesus and his disciples were not even able to do something as simple and necessary as eat
- and why?
Jesus was proving to be an extremely attractive person his authoritative teaching and warm responsive approach brought the crowds flocking
- including some important people from Jerusalem, who had managed to get inside and Jesus' family who did not

And in this scene from today's gospel reading we can identify four distinct groups

- each of these groups desired to be "in charge", in control, to direct proceedings but only one group recognised who actually was in charge and the irony is, it is not the group you might expect

There is firstly the ever growing crowd who started off with curiosity

- just wanting to see Jesus
- but now want Jesus to do whatever they think they need
- they are not concerned about Jesus, but with getting what they want

Then there is Jesus' family, who are concerned about Jesus

- that he should not be taken advantage of
- or that he is not behaving properly because he is so tired or in need of food
- they think they know what is best so they come to take him away for a while so he can rest and recover away from all this madness
- sometimes families, with the best of intentions can get in the way of good things happening

What Jesus has been doing has caused ripples as far away as Jerusalem

- we are only in chapter three of Mark's gospel and already teachers and officials have been sent to check Jesus out
- these represent the centre of control of Jewish life and religion they believe they are the ultimate authority
- what Jesus has been doing is a challenge and an affront and they have come to put this upstart in his place

The fourth and final group is actually the group causing all the problems

- they are the representatives of the enemy, of Satan and the powers of darkness these demons and evil spirits have been wreaking havoc and Jesus has been effectively overpowering them

- these demons and evil spirits are not happy about this but the irony is they are the only group that actually recognises Jesus' authority
- in spite of Jesus' efforts to keep them quiet, they name him as the Holy One of God the one who is asserting the power of the Lord God over everything showing that God is indeed in charge and because of this Jesus has the power to direct and banish the powers of darkness

Jesus is actually very capable of dealing with crowds and all their associated pressures

- his family will just have to get used to who he is and what he is doing the demons and evil spirits already know all too well he is trouble for them
- it is that third group, the teachers and officials from Jerusalem who actually represent a real threat to Jesus and his mission

When the teachers and officials accuse Jesus of being “possessed”

- this is a formal and legal charge that he exercises magic and satanic powers people charged in this way could be banished or even executed
- it was a charge Jesus needed to refute and he was able to do so by showing the total absurdity of the allegation

Jesus' opponents from Jerusalem claimed that his power to cast out demons

- was a sign Jesus had received his authority from the chief demonic power: Beelzebul that Jesus was actually in league with Satan
- they were in effect claiming Jesus was practising “black magic” which Jesus could have countered by saying he never used “magical names” or even traditional ritual formulas as other exorcists did
- in fact Jesus' motto seemed to be the fewer words, the better not even allowing the evil spirits to speak
- but instead he showed how ridiculous the allegations against him were by using proverbial sayings about divided kingdoms and households that most people were familiar with and could easily apply

If there is infighting in a kingdom, Jesus said, that kingdom cannot last

- if there are arguments in a household, it will not be there for long if Satan is making war with his own demons then it's all over for him because there is civil war in the kingdom of Satan
- or, if you want to rob the house of a crime boss and get all their goodies you can only do so when you've nobbled his bodyguards and have him tied up then you can take anything you want ... but not until then
- Jesus driving out demons and evil spirits did not mean alliance with Satan rather it showed Satan's defenses had been breached and the forces of darkness were under direct attack
- it showed that the Lord God was in charge and Jesus was the very visible sign of this

For Jesus, life was a struggle between the power of evil and the power of God

- Jesus did not waste time arguing about where evil came from he just got on with the job and dealt with it most effectively
- which drove back the forces of darkness and really annoyed some influential people like those teachers and officials from Jerusalem

Bible scholar William Barclay puts it very well:

One of the odd things is that we spend a good deal of time discussing the origin of evil; but we spend less time working out practical methods of tackling the problem ... suppose a man wakes up to find his house on fire, he does not sit down in a chair and embark upon the reading of a treatise entitled "The Origin of Fires in Private Houses". He grabs such defenses as he can muster and deals with the fire. Jesus saw the essential struggle between good and evil which is at the heart of life and raging in the world. He did not speculate about it; he dealt with it and gave to others the power to overcome evil and do the right.

You and me, all of us here today

- we are numbered among those to whom Jesus has given the power to overcome evil and do the right
- for we know who is in charge

Sometimes it seems people get uncomfortable considering "the spiritual realm"

- thinking about powers and principalities beyond this world that affect life here uncomfortable with talk of witches, wizards and warlocks want to argue whether demons are real, whether there is an actual "Satan"
- and here I'm with Jesus wherever there is evil in our world it's a waste of time and energy arguing about what caused it why it happens, where it comes from
- simply get on with dealing with it which might be in practical things like giving food, providing shelter speaking out, medicines and medical care, funding research
- and it also might be praying sometimes very pointedly and specifically
- because all of these affirm that evil is not in charge, God is Jesus is living proof that a stronger power has arrived

As I was reading and making notes for this sermon, it brought to mind something I had read that showed this very clearly. So I searched among the books on my shelf, and I found it

This happened in 1956 during the Mau Mau uprisings in East Africa. The story is told by veteran missionary Morris Plotts.

A band of roving Mau Maus came to the village of Lauri, surrounded it, and killed every inhabitant, including women and children - three hundred people in all. Not more than three miles away was the Rift Valley Academy, a private boarding school where children were being educated while their missionary parents worked elsewhere. Immediately upon leaving the carnage at Lauri the Mau Maus came with spears, clubs, torches, and bows and arrows to the school, bent on destruction.

You can imagine the fear of those children at the school. Word had already reached them about the destruction of Lauri. There was no place to flee. The only resource was prayer.

Out in the night, lighted torches were seen coming toward the school. Soon there was a complete ring of these terrorists about the school, cutting off all avenues of escape. Shouting and curses could be heard coming from the Mau Maus. Then they began to advance on the school, tightening the circle, shouting louder, coming closer. Suddenly, when they were close enough to throw a spear, they stopped. They began to retreat, and soon they were running into the jungle. A call had gone out to the authorities, and an army had been sent in the direction of the school to rescue the inhabitants. But by the time the army arrived, the would-be assassins had dispersed. The army spread out in search of them and captured the entire band of raiding Mau Maus.

Later, before the judge at their trial, the Mau Mau leader was called to the witness stand. The judge asked him, "On this night did you kill the inhabitants of Lauri?"

The leader replied, "Yes."

"Was it your intent to do the same at the Rift Valley Academy?"

"Yes."

"Well then," asked the judge, "why did you not complete the mission? Why didn't you attack the school?"

The leader, who had never read the Bible and never heard the gospel, replied, "We were on our way to attack and destroy all the people at the school. But as we came closer, all of a sudden between us and the school there were many huge men, dressed in white with flaming swords. We became afraid and we ran to hide!"

What does all this mean for us?

- two things:

one, evil is real

two, God is real and is stronger

- we are to approach life knowing that whatever else happens, God is in charge
the works of evil and darkness ultimately cannot stand
for in Jesus, the light has come

Let's take a moment to reflect,

- then I will invite you to join me in prayer

[NZ Prayer Book p.183, prayer number 3]

*Be present, Spirit of God,
within us, your dwelling place and home,
that this house may be one where
all darkness is penetrated by your light,
all troubles calmed by your peace,
all evil redeemed by your love,
all pain transformed in your suffering,
and all dying glorified in your risen life.
Amen.*