

This story in the Gospel of Mark takes place immediately following Jesus appointing the twelve disciples.

²⁰and the crowd came together again, so that Jesus and his 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 Jesus 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.”

The Wounded Healer

First Congregational Branford

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Well, that’s harsh! Jesus’ family is asking for him, and he turns his back on them. We see right from the start that Jesus means serious business - you are either with me, or you are against me.

Yes, it was harsh for him to diss his mother and brothers. But, I’m sure we all know people who’ve had to leave their family of origin because they were holding them back. Maybe the family was extremely dysfunctional. So, a member leaves and goes and makes their family, those who are of a like mind, those who will affirm, encourage, and shelter them on their path.

For Jesus, his family was whoever does the will of God.

In today's scene, Jesus can't even sit down to eat, but come on, you can't go around in 27 AD Israel healing unclean spirits, raising people from the dead, communing with lepers and tax collectors and expect to sit down to a fresh plate of sardines without an accusatory knock at the door! Jesus was turning the religion upside down! And, his family, nice, respectable Jews, want everything to remain the same!: "*The old order is good - we know it, we value it.*" Jesus is embarrassing and shaming the family. Who would've thought the Son of God would behave in such a way! Instead, he seemed to have gone out of his mind!, and they've come to intervene - along with the scribes. Scribes are tasked with interpreting and explaining laws, rules and procedures. They explain the only way Jesus can cast out demons is by the power of the greatest demon, Satan. Persons performing such magic could be banished or executed.

Jesus goes, wait a minute, why would Satan cast *out* demons?! Then he turns the tables and confronts them, and says, *if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.* If those who represented the old order were going to work against him, as one who represented the new order, the religion was going to fall apart. Jesus wanted to move away from laws and rules, and toward one's neighbor, toward compassion, healing lepers, dining with sinners, extending a hand to a non-Jew, like a Samaritan.

Jesus didn't want to do away with the religion, he wanted to reform it. *He wanted the old and the new to work together, to be one strong house.* But, those who had a firm stake in the old order weren't interested in changing anything...

Here at our beloved First Church, it's as if we're been moving in different directions, some not interested in change, some who want the church to be what it once was, others want the church to embrace a new culture and lifestyles, some want the church to be youth-based, some want a senior minister, some want a youth minister, some want both, some want to use the endowment for mission, some for mission/the building/*and* salaries, some want to leave it there for a rainy day, and some say if they don't get what they want, they'll leave. A house divided against itself cannot stand. This week a member said, *we have been stalled for so long.* Jesus gives us a clue today, no one can enter a **strong** man's house and plunder his property.

We need to build a strong house - to unite and *work together.* We need to look at our purpose for being - and if it doesn't have something to do with Jesus, this house will not stand!

Having much on my mind, early this past Wednesday morning I'd decided that when I arrived at church I would sit in the sanctuary for a good 30 minutes. On the walk from the office to the meetinghouse I remembered the sculpture in the narthex of Jesus carrying the cross. I'd heard it used to be housed in the

meetinghouse, but folks felt it was too Catholic, and it was moved to the narthex. I felt it would be visually poignant for our Wounded Healer message - so I moved it - by myself - to right below the chancel stairs - without wounding myself! The term *wounded healer* was created by psychologist Carl Jung; it was a term that priest and theologian Henri Nouwen often used for ministry. The idea states that a healer is compelled to treat people because he himself is "wounded". After I set the piece, I went and sat in the pews, and let the sculpture work its way into me. How did Jesus *feel* carrying the cross through the streets, broken, beaten, aching, humiliated, alone, knowing he was going to a miserable death. How did he feel? I cried because we sort of know, because who among us hasn't been broken? Who among us hasn't carried a cross? I cried for myself because I'm so broken, I cried for you who I know are struggling... I cried for those who've lost their lives in the volcano eruptions, I cried for the baker who denied the gay couple who just wanted a wedding cake, I cried for the couple, I cried for African-Americans who face discrimination every single day. I cried for refugees and immigrants. And, I cried for our church - because so many have left her, so many have judged her, so many have maligned her. People have said bad things about her to me. *So many expect church to be perfect, but how can it be when its filled with God's people?* I cried for all of the hurts. And, then I sat. And, after a while, I heard: *For surely he has borne our pain... For surely he has borne your pain.* For by his wounds we are healed. What suffering church hasn't taken solace in that??

Listen now to the dedication inscription on the sculpture that sculptor, Betty Mailhouse wrote us in 1975 - through these ages she speaks to us still: *Dedicated with love and vision for a peaceful tomorrow.....* love and vision can come *through* suffering, through woundedness.

A Christian community is a healing community not because wounds and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision. (~ Henri Nouwen) From the cross came glory! The wounds which are here will become a place where God makes known his new creation! A broken body can lead to new life. We say to one another, and to all who enter our doors, *this church is our body broken - this is what we've got - this is who we are - we're a broken church, but through these wounds you can be healed - this is our body broken for you...*

Leonard Cohen sang, *there's a crack in everything - that's how the light gets in!* It's okay to be broken. :) We meet each other in our wounds.

Our Savior carries his cross, and he helps us carry ours, through darkness *into the light*. I know of no better symbol for our church. Perhaps the stone that had been cast aside will become the cornerstone.

We Christians need to remember, the reason the church stands is to fill the broken places inside of her members... *If we live into that, no one can enter this strong house and plunder its property.*

I invite you, if you're willing, to raise your arm and hand to heaven... leave it there a moment, leave it there until you feel ready to take God's hand, and when you're ready, close your hand... let his wrap around yours. Tight. Precious Lord, take my hand... lead me into your heart, lead me into your home....

Here's to a peaceful tomorrow. Amen.

Hello to you who are watching us from home. Peace be with you.

We thank Carol Titcomb for being our Guest Pianist this morning.

- Our Flowers this morning are in honor of David Crockett and Susan Winkel's wedding anniversary.
- Thank you to our choir for their lovely voices this past year.
- Lil Sakai is our Stephen Minister this morning - she'll be standing by the piano after worship if you'd like some care and prayer.
- The church staff will be holding their annual planning retreat tomorrow. The office will close at 1pm.
- Beginning next Sunday we move to our 9:00 am service, and we'll be at Killam's Pt., where we'll celebrate both a baptism and receive 5 new members!
- Please come back for the large group gathering of Life Among the Believers at 11:30 where we'll build the Life Among the Believers ark! I'm sorry we won't have subs for you like last week!
- Thank you.