

## Jesu Juva

### “Binding and Bruising the Evil One”

Text: Mark 3:20-35; 2 Cor. 4:13-5:1; Genesis 3:8-15

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

We're starting the second half of the church year today, the long green Pentecost season with its focus on the life of the church. The first half of the year we focus on the life of Jesus - His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension in the seasons of Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter. Now we focus on the church in the world *after* the ascension of Jesus. The Holy Spirit going out into the all the world through the preaching of the Word and the giving of the Sacraments.

And with that as our focus, the Gospel that we heard today is a good place to start - where we find Jesus opposed and spoken against. As you heard, His family thought He was out of His mind, and some Jewish leaders accused Him of being demon-possessed. The things He said were revolutionary, and so the good He did, well that must be evil too. Or perhaps we could put it this way: *For God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son* (John 3:16) . . . and the world thought Him crazy at best, and dangerous at worst.

Now as I said, I think that's a good place to start this half of the church year because that's the direction our world seems - in many ways - to be going right now. Christians and churches that hold to traditional, orthodox Christian doctrine are more and more being considered wrong and behind the times as best, and dangerous at worst. Yet this is nothing new. Though history changes and the church has been more acceptable at certain times in history, there have been times like this too - when the world thinks the church so dangerous that it must be eliminated. The first few centuries after Jesus saw the church under intense persecution. That changed when the emperor Constantine made Christianity the religion of the empire and protected and advanced it. But then there was the rise of Islam and the dark ages, the advancement of Christianity again in the renaissance, and then the attacks of rationalism, scientism, communism, and now secularism. Just to name a few.

But no matter what the tide of history, in times good for the church and bad, from the time of Adam and Eve to time still to come, this has been a constant: *satan is at work*. Sometimes subtle, sometimes obvious. When times are good, tempting us to be complacent and satisfied. When times are bad, trying to get us to hide and be silent in fear. When times are easy, luring us into getting fat and lazy. When times are tough, discouraging us into hunkering down and separating ourselves from the world. And it's not just the world and its history - I'll bet most of you can identify all of those times *in*

*your own lives.* Times when you've grown complacent with your faith and satisfied with your knowledge of God's Word. Times when you wouldn't speak about Jesus or the truth because you were afraid of what others would think if they knew you were one of "them." Times when fat and lazy, the Bible didn't get opened for a while, your prayers faltered, and church was just going through the motions. And times when you thought: *To hell with the world*, and you decide to fight evil with evil instead of with love and forgiveness. And maybe you're in one of those times right now.

Satan working, in good times and bad, in the world and in each of us, trying to weaken and destroy our faith and snatch us from our Father in heaven.

So how good to hear, then, these words from Jesus today, in response to those who oppose Him. That He is not demon-possessed nor fighting evil with evil, and He is not against them either. In fact, He has come to save them, by binding satan and plundering him. ***No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.*** And so what happened at the time of Jesus, what was truly so incredible and revolutionary, was that God entered the strong man's house in the person of Jesus, to bind him and plunder him.

Now you may be thinking: it sure doesn't look like He did so! Just look at all the evil and false teaching and godlessness in our world today. Satan sure doesn't seem bound, and Jesus doesn't look very victorious. And perhaps that is true if you are thinking of *the world* as satan's house. But is it? Consider what we heard from the apostle Paul today: ***We do not lose heart.*** Even in a world that seems intent on marching toward evil. Why? Because ***though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.***

Now that's quite the opposite of how many tend to think, thinking that it's what I can see and feel that's real, that's lasting, and what I cannot see, the spiritual, is uncertain and transient. But the truth is just the opposite. And so it's not this world that satan is battling for, *it's you* - your heart and your mind. If he can use the things of this world, great. But it's not the world he wants, it's you. What we see in the world are the symptoms of the larger problem - the corruption and enslavement of hearts and minds that he has been able to accomplish.

And so it is precisely there that Jesus has come to bind the strong man and plunder him. To free hearts and minds enamored with sin and captivated by evil, and turn them to Him in repentance and faith. And that's why the weapon Jesus used looked so senseless and stupid to the world: For how can a captive crucifixion set free? How can death give life? How can shame give honor? In the world it can't. Jesus is out of His mind. But on the

battleground of your heart and mind, the word of the cross is the power of God to set people free. It is the forgiveness of sins that binds satan and strips him of his power. It is the truth that sets our minds on the things that are eternal. For on the cross, satan looked powerful, but in the resurrection, He is exposed. God's love and life is more powerful than sin and death. And so for those bound in sin and death - you and me - Jesus' resurrection binds the one who has bound us, and so sets us free.

And that binding and freedom is now accomplished where His cross and resurrection is for us now - in the preaching of the Word and the giving of the Sacraments. Those weapons look senseless and stupid in worldly terms too. Water, words, bread, and wine aren't weapons! Oh, but they are when the Holy Spirit is in them, making them the very means through which satan is bound still today. For through them the Holy Spirit is working, cleansing hearts, freeing minds, and feeding souls. Neglect these and despise the Spirit who works through them and gives forgiveness through them, and so let satan loose in your heart and mind and face a dangerous eternal reality. But remain in these and satan is muzzled, bound, weakened, and plundered. Your heart and mind claimed by the Spirit for Christ, for life, and for eternity.

An eternity that's not just some far distant, dreamy, future hope that we'll get to enjoy *someday*, but an eternity that has begun already now. A new reality, a new family, a new life that Jesus has provided for you even now. For Jesus ***looked about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."*** That is how He looks at you and how we can now look at each other. That doesn't diminish our earthly relationship but adds to them. And it doesn't mean we'll have no problems - as you know, families have plenty of problems and often fight and disagree. Churches too. But it does mean there's something else that defines us now - not just the family we're physically born into, but also the family we're spiritually born into, through water and the word. The family we have Sunday dinner with. The family we sorrow with, rejoice with, and live with in forgiveness and faith.

And as we do, this happens too: *Jesus continues bruising the serpent's head*. As you know, He is the offspring of the woman spoken of to Eve in Genesis, who would bruise the serpent-satan's head through His cross. But know this too: He still is. Everytime a person is baptized into this family, everytime you hear the word of God and keep it, everytime you repent and receive forgiveness, everytime you give forgiveness instead of holding a grudge, everytime you pray, everytime you do good works instead of lashing out, everytime you speak the truth, everytime you help and love and live as the child of God you are . . . you know why satan is so mad? Because it's his head continuing to be bruised! Like a multitude, a myriad, of little Christ's little heels being banged onto his head. A constant drumbeat, a constant bruising. The triumph of Jesus on the cross continuing on through the Spirit in those who belong to Him. Which puts a little different spin on things, on your life and what you do, doesn't it? Even makes it kinds of fun!

And if satan flips out and goes crazy against us because of it? Which, really, is what we should expect, isn't it? And if the whole world turn against the church? No worries. ***For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.***

That's the confidence we have in Jesus, through His Spirit given to us, making us sons of the Father. So as we sang, *satan may have designed our fall* (LSB #668), but Jesus has accomplished our salvation. And He is greater. The strong man is bound by the stronger man, and you belong to Him.

That's a good note to start this half of the church year on, don't you think?  
But not only today - to remember and believe and rejoice and live everyday.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.