Comments **Second Sunday after Pentecost** **June 6, 2021**

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.
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1 Samuel 8:4-11,(12-15),16-20,(11:14-15) NRSV

Samuel has ruled Israel, under God, for many years. Now an old man, he has handed power on to his sons, but they are corrupt and pervert justice. Now the leaders of Israel meet with Samuel (8:6): to them, the time has come to be ruled by a king, as other nations are (8:5). This displeases Samuel (8:6). He seeks God's counsel, in prayer. God advises him to grant the people their wish (8:7); Samuel is to see it as their rejection of God, rather than of him as leader. This is not new: since leaving Egypt, they have worshipped "other gods" (8:8). Samuel is to warn them of the consequences of being ruled by an earthly king: their sons will be enlisted in the army (8:12); while some will farm the king's lands, others will make armaments; women will work for him (8:13); he will take the best of their produce (8:14, 8:15) and animals (8:16) for his courtiers; their slaves will become his; they will be taxed, and will become his slaves (8:17). You won't be happy, but God won't help you! (8:18) The people are determined to have a king (8:19).

In Chapters 9 and 10, Samuel, as God's agent, anoints Saul as king, and the people choose Saul by lottery. In 11:14-15, the people confirm Saul as king.

Psalm 138 NRSV

The psalmist expresses his gratitude for God's steadfast, enduring love and his care for his faithful followers, for whom he will fulfill his purpose (v. 8). Vv. 1-2 picture the psalmist in the courtyard of the Temple ("toward", v. 2) to offer thanks. For v. 2b, the Revised English Bible has: "for you have exalted your promises above the heavens". V. 3 tells of the psalmist's experience: when he called upon God, he not only answered but "made me bold and strong" (REB). Vv. 4-5 are a hymn of praise. The REB begins vv. 4 and 5 with "Let": may "all the kings" praise God when they hear his words; may they sing of God's ways, because (v. 6), exalted as he is, he cares for "the lowly" but takes note of the errors of the unjustly proud ("haughty"). Vv. 7-8 are an expression of faith, of trust and acknowledgement. In spite of his troubles, God preserves the psalmist, exercising divine power against his foes. (God's power is his "right hand", v. 7.)

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 NRSV

Paul recalls Psalm 116:10 in the usual translation of his day: the psalmist had been suffering greatly and was near death; later he still had faith and so he "spoke" (4:13). Paul adapts this to his situation: he too is afflicted and he feels his death approaching; even so, he continues to proclaim the good news ("speak"). He has "the same spirit of faith", an active faith imbued by the Holy Spirit. Why? Because he has certain hope that the Father ("the one", 4:14) will raise him to be with him, as he did Jesus. (While "we" and"us" usually refer to Paul and sometimes his companions, here the words may refer to all Christians at Corinth, or all Christians everywhere.) "Everything" (4:15) Paul does is for the sake of those who come to Christ, so that the response to God's freely given love ("grace") may be thanksgiving by "more and more people".

This is happening, so Paul does not "lose heart" (4:16), despite those who oppose his efforts. Even though his "outer nature", his appearance (probably due to his health) is deteriorating, his "inner nature" (his faith and certain hope) increases; he becomes more like Christ every day. He thinks of his sufferings and humiliation as merely "this slight momentary affliction" (4:17). It is preparing him for enormous fullness ("eternal weight") of glory of being with Christ. Why? Because his vision is fixed on the unseen, "eternal" (4:18), not on the "seen", "temporary", transitory.

In 5:1 he explains 4:18 using two metaphors: "earthly tent" and "building from God". The "earthly tent", our fleshly bodies, are destroyed by death, but the "building from God" is a dwelling place that is permanent, secure, guaranteed, protected and eternal. His "we know" is an assertion of definite hope.

Mark 3:20-35 NRSV

Early in his ministry, Jesus is in Galilee. He has driven out demons, evil spirits (cured people of diseases that were, or were thought to be, psychiatric). V. 19b tells us "he went home". Crowds have swarmed around him, curious; now they do so again. So many seek help that "they could not even eat" (v. 20). Some mistake his enthusiasm for his mission as insanity, so much so that his blood "family" (v. 21, including his disciples) try to "restrain him".

Word has reached "Jerusalem" (v. 22); scribes say that he is possessed by a demon, "Beelzebul", a foreign god, and by Satan, the devil, the "ruler of evil spirits". Jesus answers them in "parables" (v. 23, analogies). It is logically impossible for Satan to cast out Satan. Since Jesus' exorcisms are defeats for Satan, they could hardly be performed through Satan. If Satan's realm ("kingdom", v. 24) is divided – some demonizing people and others removing evil spirits – it would cease to be, as would a "house" (v. 25, a building or those who live in it). V. 26 puts this plainly. Then v. 27: to rob the house of a strong, powerful, man would require a stronger, more powerful man. In 1:7, John the Baptizer has called Jesus "more powerful", so Jesus speaks of himself: he is beginning to eliminate Satan.

"Truly" (v. 28) shows that Jesus speaks with authority. In his baptism, the Holy Spirit came to Jesus , so it is in his words and actions. One *blasphemes* if one claims that Jesus' authority is from Satan rather than from the Spirit. All sins, however heinous, will be forgiven, except believing that the spirit in Jesus is "an unclean spirit" (v. 30), from Satan: this sin will stand forever ("eternal", v. 29).

Mark employs a sandwich construction: vv. 19-21 are one slice of bread, vv. 22-30 the meat, and vv. 31-35 the other slice. We return to Jesus' house. He is inside; his blood family and the crowd are outside the open door. Jesus considers all who *do the will of God* (v. 35), including recognizing that he heals through the Holy Spirit, to be his family.