



## The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

### Sermon: Year B – 3rd Sunday in Pentecost – June 10, 2018, Dealing with Satan

There's a lot going on in the Gospel reading this morning—Satan and demons. “He's gone out of his mind.” “He has Beelzebub.” My gosh. These guys think Jesus is possessed. But what message is hiding under all the layers of talk about Beelzebub, Satan, and demons?

We have to bear in mind that people in Jesus' time believed in Satan and other demonic powers. And Jesus himself probably believed in a personified Satan. But for you and me in 2018, it's important to take a look at the realities around us that are embodied by the name “Satan.”

It's not so much about a red-skinned demon with a pitchfork and horns sticking up out of his head. It's more about the notions and ideas that go against the message of loving God and loving neighbor, notions and ideas that seduce us and get us to believe that God's people are unworthy of kindness, compassion, and love and that it's okay to lash out, to victimize, to backbite and gossip, and to do harmful things to others because we feel we have the right to judge.

So instead of focusing on this character named Satan, let's think about how we're held captive to lower powers in our lives, lower powers that want us to worship them instead of God.

What might those forces be? Those forces that take hold of us and keep us in spiritual prison? Those forces that turn us away from God and cause us to hurt God, to hurt others? Many of those things end in “isms.”

Racism. Classism. Sexism. Clericalism.

But do we really believe that one group of people is better than the other because of the color of their skin? Or that people who have great deals of money are better than those who have less? Or that men are better than women, or that women are better than men? Or that priests, bishops and deacons are better than lay people, or that lay people are better than priests, bishops and deacons?

Do we believe that because of any of this, one group of people has the God-given right to dominate another? And then there's that other “ism”—elitism. And we really have to be careful of that one. We're in a cathedral, after all, that was founded by royal charter and a place of worship for Hawaiian royalty. And while that makes us special, that doesn't make us better than any other congregation in this diocese or in the Episcopal Church, and if anything, it's a call to humility because of the example of royal congregants like Queen Emma and Queen Lili'uokalani.

And isn't it interesting that when Jesus confronts these “isms” and names them, the first thing that happens is that his family worries about accusations of his being possessed by demons? And in response Jesus asks, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Jesus has to confront the “isms” because he's here to bring the kingdom of God to all of us. He has to name and expose the things that are barriers to a full and loving relationship with God—maybe even our families.

And what keeps us captive to these things? This story tells us that it may be those around us. Family. That can be very difficult to walk away from. Jesus' family comes to take him home because they're listening to others around them who say that Jesus is possessed.

“Our beloved Church regards her children as having bodies as well as souls to be cared for, and sanctions the consecration of these and all that is beautiful in nature and art to the service of God.” . . . Queen Emma.

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But Jesus knows what's going on. And when his family comes to see him, it's as if they get a slap in the face.

Who are my mother and my brothers?

His words are a shock. But think about the times we've had to deal with our families' doubts when we've discerned the will of God. And this isn't the only time Jesus himself faces it. There's that famous and disturbing passage about the consequence of mission and ministry where Jesus talks about bringing division rather than tranquility:

*Five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.* (Luke 12:52-53)

Jesus warns us that those who care of us, those who nurture us, those who love us, may also have the propensity to bind us to quote/unquote Satan, the lower powers that keep us from discerning and living into God's will for us and for the world.

I remember being a little kid and one neighbors' kids getting into a very heated argument with another neighbors' kids. They were standing there hurling insults at each other. And one of 'em in exasperation finally said, "You're just like that because you guys don't have any money!" Then one of the mothers came out and said, "Don't just stand there and listen to that. Punch 'em in the mouth." The other kids ran away, thank God. If one of 'em'd gotten punched in the mouth, no doubt the two mothers would have gotten into it and thrown blows. And I ask you, would that've been the will of God or would that've been captivity to a lower power?

I also remember my stepfather's scolding me one day when I was in the fourth grade, because a bully at school was taunting me. "Punch 'em in the face," he said. But I knew I couldn't do that. I'd get taken to the office for fighting and probably would've gotten the paddle from the principal, let alone retribution later on from the bully and his brothers. And maybe, just maybe somewhere along the way I heard or read Jesus' admonition in Luke:

*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you...*" (Luke 6:27-28)

I can see why Jesus shows us that his family might be part of the problem.

The question, then, for you and for me is, "Are we part of the problem, or are we part of the solution?" Do we give into lower forces and encourage others to do the same? Or do we discern God's will and muster up the courage to do the right thing?

Being a Christian isn't easy. It's not always easy to follow Jesus and live lives grounded in love. There's a high price to pay—maybe even separation and alienation from our families, accusations of possession and insanity. There's a high price to pay, but we also bear in mind the reward. And that reward is salvation, that reward is redemption, that reward is freedom from the bonds of evil, and that reward is lives filled with love—love for God, love for others, and love for ourselves.

May the presence of Christ in Scripture, in this Eucharist, and in our lives continue to inspire and lead us all to that end.

*Amen.*