

9 June 2024, 3 Pentecost Proper 5B (Track 1)
St. John's Parish of Newtonville

1 Samuel 8:4-11, 16-20
Psalm 138
2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1
Mark 3:20-35

Who Is In Your House?

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Let us pray.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts beating as one be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer, and set our hearts on fire with your love. **Amen.**

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." Matthew and Luke record similar sayings of Jesus.

You might also be familiar with it said this way: "A house divided against itself cannot stand." These words, alluding to Jesus' words, open a speech Abraham Lincoln gave at the Illinois Republican Party's convention in June 1858. At that convention, Lincoln was nominated for the U.S. Senate. This line was so powerful that the speech has been called "The House Divided Speech."

In that speech, Lincoln is talking about slavery. Plain and simple. His point is that slavery being legal in the Southern states and illegal in the Northern states isn't going to work in the long run. Lincoln is explicit, though, that he doesn't predict the house – the United States – will fall. Rather, he predicts that the country will pick a lane: either slavery will be legal everywhere or it will be illegal everywhere. Less than 3 years later, Lincoln will find out he wasn't quite right. The house does pick a lane, but only after intensive division.

Jesus is most immediately talking about demons. He has done an exorcism, and the Pharisees accuse him of using demonic power to do it. Jesus tells them quite directly that demons can't exorcise demons.

I think we can find a deeper lesson here, a lesson that Lincoln's take on Jesus' words hits on. Jesus has a warning for us: don't let division put your house, your community, at risk of falling.

Our lectionary deprives us of the first couple of words of Mark 3:20, "Then he went home." Jesus is at home when he is accused of consorting with Beelzebub. So, it seems that people around Jesus' home are the ones accusing him of teaming up with evil. Ouch! That sounds like a divided house. Jesus' own community assumes the worst of him.

Today's Gospel lesson ends with Jesus saying, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." This is part of Jesus' warning. Consider carefully who you consider to be in your house. It's not just blood relatives. Jesus wants all of us, all of God's children, to view ourselves as members of the same house, but that house will stand only if we love all of God's children.

This message is readily applicable to the Church. We, the People of God, who try to do the will of God and who are disciples and apostles by Jesus' commissioning and the Holy Spirit's empowering, need to be careful that our house, our community is not divided. And yet, it seems that division, especially among Christians, is at its worse. That division seems to come from not viewing each other as members of the same house: "they" are not part of "our" house. Who is in your house?

Consider that question as I read you two sets of comments about LGBTQ+ inclusion from social media.

Here's the first set.

love the people but hate the sin. It's pretty simple

Read Genesis 19 and then get back to us.

(That's a reference to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.)

Leviticus 20:13 []: "If a man also lie with mankind as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an[] abomination. They shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them."

the LGBT community is full of sexual predators and degenerates. Repent

The second set has two more, longer comments. First,

God has specifically created man and woman and he has set those bounds not to be crossed. [(]Mark 10:6-9) He has also set in place those ways in which men and women are to relate to one another, and how they are not. (1 Cor. 7:2) I pray that you will repent [] for your homosexual lifestyle which is in clear contradiction to God's word (Lev. 18:22, Rom. 1:27-32, Lev. 20:13, 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 1 Tim. 1:8-11)

(I'll save the Bible lesson on the so-called "clobber passages," several of which are identified above. Suffice it to say, those passages do not address LGBTQ+ identities.) The second comment:

This is the month of the sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ, if you do not repent from your wicked ways, the door of hell will be wide open for your poor souls, Find DIVINE DIVINE, for your way is doom, those who do not walk through the gates of My Mercy will walk through the gates of My justice, your ways are sinful, wicked, you offend God himself.

The first set of comments are directed at me, responding to a comment I made advocating for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people. All these commenters know about me is that I am gay and a Christian.

You might wonder if it matters if people know I'm a priest. I don't have any examples of that for you just yet, but the second set of comments comes close. These two longer comments, which have been deleted, were on a YouTube video of the sermon I gave at All Saints Brookline on June 19, 2022. The sermon was, not surprisingly, about LGBTQ+ inclusion. These

commenters knew that I was a seminarian in the process of becoming a priest.

There you have it: a house divided. Wait a minute, though. These are traditional, Bible-believing Christians. Aren't those who advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusion, like me, the ones dividing the house? In a word: No.

Advocating for the exclusion of any of God's children, claiming God's image for ourselves while denying it to others, that divides the house. Denying that LGBTQ+ people are children of God, beloved by God, proclaiming that the identities of queer people like me are sinful, that divides the house. Proclaiming a God who loves some of God's children and hate others divides the house against itself. These divide the family of God – all of us created in the beautiful diverse image of the divine – against itself. Excluding any of God's children drills holes in the house's foundation, putting it in danger of collapse.

God is not pie! You don't need God to hate me so that there is more of God's love for you. God's love is infinite and eternal, far beyond what we can ever hope to comprehend. God loves each of us completely. There is no need to divvy up God's love because God's love has no limits, and it can't be divided.

That is where there is hope. There's another house, a house that was not made by human hands and cannot be destroyed by human hands. God's house, in which there is perfect love. That house welcomes us all regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, favorite color, favorite food, or anything that makes us who we are. In that house, there is diversity, and yet oneness: a kaleidoscope that bears the image of the One through whom all things were made. That house is a house of limitless love for each of us. That house cannot be divided. It knows only oneness of being and will. That is where we are meant to live.

And so, it is incumbent on us to show that there is a better way; to show that we all are and can be members of one house, God's house; to proclaim that the division that exclusion brings is not life-giving; to invite all to join us in the house that knows only love.

A house divided against itself cannot stand. God's house is a house of unity in love, and there is no house stronger.

Amen.