

Second Sunday after Pentecost(B) 6 June 2021

Genesis 3:8-15 / Psalm 130 / 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 / Mark 3:20-35

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Good morning. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!

We have a lot to be glad about today, starting with the sun shining and the air June-like, not March or April-like. Today is the first Sunday in ordinary, or ordered, time after Pentecost, the Sundays that fall outside of the great Church seasons of Easter and Christmas, and Advent and Lent that get us ready for them.

Some of us may know Ordinary Time as the Green Sundays as the colors on the altar change to green for the rest of the summer and into the fall. It's not so "ordinary," though. The color green is said to symbolize the hope and life of each new day. And in some denominations this time is meant to support new disciples, along with the congregation, in living out the gifts and callings discerned during the Easter season and commissioned on the Day of Pentecost.

At Saint Andrew's, this year the Second Sunday after Pentecost, the first "Green Sunday" of the season, is the day we welcome our fifth-grade class to First Communion at 11:30 this morning. You are all very welcome to attend, and the

service will also be recorded on YouTube; we'll send around a link for those who can't be here at the later service this morning.

And next Sunday, we'll rejoice again as several fifth-graders who cannot be here today will celebrate their First Communion during 9:15 worship. We rejoice with all the communicants' families and loved ones, and pray for them as they join in this sacrament with their community of faith.

So today's a happy day, one where it's very apt to hear about God's relationship with the first man and woman in the Garden, in our first reading. And in the gospel we hear how God's Son shows a new view of the kingdom of heaven, offering a wide welcome to all.

Our first reading is one of the two creation stories in the book of Genesis, from the Hebrew Scriptures, describing the first people and how humankind came to know sorrow and sin. The man and woman don't even have names in this version of creation, the story of original sin - or perhaps we could call it the story of original insecurity.

The first man and woman fall into the tempter's suggestion that God is keeping things from them - and it makes them believe they can't establish their value, their

worth, on their own. Then the tempter suggests they don't really need God, but can know good and evil - in other words, can know all things - on their own. No God needed.

But once the first people take matters into their own hands, cutting ties to God doesn't help at all! Their insecurity is even worse, and the next thing you know the man and the woman are defining themselves against each other. They're not one anymore. They've become alienated from God, from each other, from God's creation...from themselves!

We see how their awareness of not wearing clothes connects with being crafty or clever, as eating from the tree of knowledge leads the man and woman to recognize their vulnerability, and to feel self-conscious. And so they look for scapegoats when things go wrong. The man blames the woman, and she blames the snake.

We see a similar dynamic in this morning's Gospel reading, but playing out with different groups of people. We see the crowds, the religious authorities, even Jesus' family, judging him against their social and religious norms, which is one way we keep our vulnerability at bay. We create rules that help us define ourselves, and are a handy standard to use for judging our neighbors.

When someone doesn't conform to our rules, they're considered rebels, or radicals, or immoral, or troublemakers. Which is kind of what is happening to Jesus.

And it's early on in Saint Mark's gospel! All Jesus has done so far is get baptized, announce the coming kingdom of God, call disciples, cast out some demons and heal sick people. So why would Jesus be getting hassled?

Well, he did choose a tax collector as one of those disciples, and he healed people and cast out demons without worrying whether it was on the Sabbath. And he didn't mind being approached by lepers, by people considered untouchable. Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God was based on including everybody, on offering abundant life to everyone in need of it.

Which could make people think you're, well, maybe not possessed by a demon yourself, but - even your own family - might think you're a little nuts. And so you get called names. This was happening to Jesus, and it still happens to people who follow him. Because the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ shows no boundaries and doesn't recognize any laws that would keep it from being shared with everyone.

Today's gospel reading shows Jesus' conflict with his family, and with the religious establishment of his time, at both the beginning and end of the story, like bookends. And in the center is the conflict with Satan, that's told in a parable, or teaching story. Jesus makes it clear in the teaching story that when he's casting out demons, he's coming to plunder Satan's house and bring about his end. Jesus is stronger than Satan.

So even when it looks like Satan has succeeded in destroying Jesus in the crucifixion, that destruction turns into the victory of resurrection and new life. We know that even though the power of evil still fights against good today, it has already been conquered in Jesus' death and resurrection. In a way, his whole story is right there in today's Gospel reading.

Maybe the question we might ask today isn't, why was *Jesus* getting hassled so much? but rather, why aren't *we* getting hassled more? Why aren't we pushing the boundaries of what's socially and religiously acceptable, to reach more folks with the surprising, gracious, inclusive love of Jesus Christ? Is that the kind of welcoming love we want to offer? Then we may need to ask whether we're

communicating that message in our words and actions clearly enough, both inside this building and outside in our community.

God's welcome and mercy are so broad. Jesus teaches that we find our identity, our kinship, our community through the relationship we share in God through Word and Sacrament. And all people who live in and work for God's kingdom are family.

Perhaps we are just commissioned to say, God cares. God wants you to lead a full life and be healed of whatever afflicts you. God wants us to love each other. I'm here to remind you of that and to help.

Amen.