



Bishop James Mauney's Sermon for June 7, 2015

I would like for us to begin by looking at the Prayer for the Day.

All-powerful God, in Jesus Christ you turned death into life and defeat into victory. Increase our faith and trust in him, that we may triumph over all evil in the strength of the same Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

My Jesus is a rock in a weary land!

Do you really want me to spend ten minutes building a case for the weariness of the land? CNN AND FOX can do it for me in five minutes every day. Flipping from CNN to FOX and FOX to CNN can weary me in two minutes! Looking in the mirror most days can do in about ten seconds.

I'm not going to spend a minute on our weariness, I want all my time talking about the rock!

What a gospel lesson!

The scribes have come down from Jerusalem; they have come down from on high and have pronounced the judgement that Jesus casts out demons by the power of the head of the demons, Beelzebub.

This is a pivotal set of verses in the gospel of Mark. It is to the gospel of Mark as the battle of Gettysburg is to the Civil War. As the battle on little round top turns the tide on one end of the battlefield on the second day and Picket's charge

becomes marked as the high water mark of the rebellion on the third day, by the end of this text Mark has Jesus leave this battlefield in command of the field. It is a pivotal text in Mark.

In chapter 1 Jesus comes forth and at his baptism the Holy Spirit descends upon HIM! Upon HIM! So we are to watch this one!

Now I am reading How to train your dragon, because my five year old granddaughter is. It has about 11 or 12 books in the series and I have read 5 so far. But there is a young boy named hiccup who has a wonderful little dragon that often descends upon and remains upon his head. What they do together is wonderful to watch from book to book.

In the opening chapters, Jesus and the Holy Spirit as one overcome the temptation of the devil, proclaim the kingdom of God, casts out demons, touch and cleanse a leper, heal every disease and cast out many demons, makes a lame man walk, forgives sin, calls disciples to follow, IS a rock in a weary, weary land, and has five encounters with the most religious men of the day who are upset because he claims to forgive sins, upset because he eats with sinners, upset because his disciples don't fast, upset because his hungry disciples on the Sabbath pull off grain as they walk through the fields, upset because he heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath rather than wait till the following day. And the grand poohbahs, the scribes, come down and pronounce to all that Jesus is plainly, obviously in league with The Lord of the demons, Beelzebub.

Now I don't know about you, but I find more and more that when something occurs to religious people that they don't like, they usually declare it is of the devil. It is pure evil!

Jesus says, "I am not of Satan's house. Look at all the casting out of demons. I have bound Satan and am tearing down his cartel. A house divided cannot stand. And don't you dare say a single, derogatory word about the dear HOLY SPIRIT that inspires the words and deeds done by me. That is just unforgivable!"

Jesus is really offended by the comment about the Holy Spirit, "don't you dare call the Spirit of God the Spirit of Satan!" He ties in with the will of God, his Father. It can be a Trinitarian lesson!

Mark so beautifully and powerfully has the house of Jesus immediately come on the scene. Mary and all the brothers. They have come to capture him because he is obviously out of his mind and making a scene, maybe embarrassing them and even the name of Joseph, blessed be the name of his Father. And Jesus states clearly to the house.

Jesus says, "Who is in the house of my Father? Those who do the will of my Father."

The gospel text for today is a demonstration that the house of the trinity is NOT divided.

The attempt of the scribes to directly attack and then outflank Jesus is routed by Jesus and the foolish charge of his family is rather quickly crushed by Jesus. Unlike the north that hesitated in its pursuit, Mark has Jesus utterly rout the enemy over the next four chapters.

Jesus teaches four wonderful parables about the amazing kingdom of God, he stills a storm like Yahweh brought order to chaos in the creation story. He calms the storm that Jonah could not, he casts out the horrible demon named Legion, raises a child from the dead, a woman is healed just by touching his robe for heaven's sake. He sends out the twelve in skirmishes with the demons, he feeds five thousand walks on water, he heals hordes of people, and then he attacks the scribes and Pharisees head on and sends them reeling. He moves his campaign out among the Gentiles where he heals and feeds four thousand more.

"Don't you talk about the Spirit that lives within me, and don't you talk about my Father."

In these opening chapters of the gospel of Mark, There is a beautiful oneness of Father and Spirit in, with, and under Jesus the Son.

And we know that this gospel is not written from front to back, but from back to front. It is the crucified and risen Lord, the one who was bound by the scribes and Satan, bound to a cross who was killed as they screamed in effect, "My house! My house!"

But the lamb who was slain has begun his reign ever since that tomb opened. That rock in a weary land, who says to you, "Come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest. Take my double yoke upon you and I will walk your life with you, side by side. Let your terrible yoke be my yoke. Let my hope fill your yoke.

Because "I am your rock for a weary land."

Jesus is not dead. He is alive and that makes all the difference. Sisters die, parents die, children die but my Lord is alive and has marked them as his very own. Wars rise, stock markets fall, haves and have-nots will find a way together in hope or I prophesy to you that economies will crumble. Jesus is the rock in a weary land. We prayed together, "Lord Jesus you turned death into life and defeat into victory. Increase our faith and trust in him, that we may triumph over all evil in the strength of the same Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord."

We aren't going to triumph over all evil. But in the strength of the same Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, by the powerful Spirit who brings life from death, who speaks through prophets, who raises up and casts down, through the will of the Father of Jesus, the Almighty God yet holds the field.

God's Word forever shall abide, no thanks to foes who fear it.

Now listen to me, Jesus marks you in baptism and says "you are mine and nothing will separate you from my love. You are mine little lamb, little child. You may not be able to forgive yourself for things done or things left undone. You may not be able to forgive your brother or colleague or neighbor of some unforgiveable sin, but you belong to me and I love you. I am your rock in a weary land. But look around at all of your blessings and count them till you are weary from counting. I am the fount of every blessing."

There is a half way home in Charlotte where sanctuary, hope for a future, a community of support is provided in a beautiful neighborhood. Right at the front door is a rock and from it pours forth water, like a rock in the wilderness, like a rock in a weary land.

So we do not lose heart in this half way house living of this world, even though it seems the tide is against us. This slight temporary affliction is giving way to an eternal weight of glory because we look to the one who cannot be seen and in signs of the temporary we see the one who is eternal. If you have not been baptized, look to the fount of blessing, the rock in your weary land.

Jesus is there to immerse you in his life, his death, and his resurrection for the entire forgiveness of your sin, your triumph over death, your promise that you belong to Him. There in the water though not seen is what is eternal in promise and ever present in your life. Here is an invitation for all to come. Jesus invites you and promises his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, will give you life. You have the very promise of the Father of Jesus upon that very word. To call that untrue or of the devil.....well that is just unforgiveable.

Yes, everything is for your sake so that grace as it extends to more and more people may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.

Our Synod Assembly theme this year is "Ambassador for Christ: Knowing your Congregational Neighborhood to do God's Will". You see, from that font, it is extending the grace to more and more people, so that the thanksgiving that Jesus is a rock in a weary land may be felt by the ones who are so lonely near your church, that the ones who despair within one block, one pasture, one mile, one stone's throw, may too know a rock in their weary land through your kind spirit that searches them out and invites.

My Jesus is a rock in this weary land. He is not just My Jesus, he is their Jesus, their rock too. But by our single word of knowing them, they too may triumph over all evil in the strength of the same Jesus Christ, OUR Savior and Lord. Amen.