

# SUMMER

## SERMON SERIES - 2021

June 6, 2021

*Pentecost 2*

*1 Samuel 8:4-20*

*2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1*

*Psalms 138*

*Mark 3:20-35*

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Jesus went home. Jesus, he's out of his mind and needs to be restrained. Jesus, he has the devil in him. Who would believe and say these things about Jesus? People in power who oppose him? That's understandable, fearing how Jesus confronts powers to help those who are suffering to be well and whole again. But Jesus' family? Hearing these things about Jesus and coming to restrain him? Did his mother and siblings believe it was for his own good, his safety, to protect Jesus? Who has gone out of their mind? Who has the devil got hold of? Whose house is divided?

This is the poignant irony in today's reading and in ways throughout the Gospel of Mark. Jesus' mind and purpose are clear. It's the mind and heart and mission of God. But so many, from those who oppose Jesus to those closest to Jesus, even Jesus' own family, his household, have gone out of their minds. And the devil, or that which opposes God, that couldn't be farther from possessing Jesus, and is the very destructive force Jesus confronts and challenges, to set those who are suffering free, healing and restoring people to life!

Jesus is neither out of his mind nor possessed by the devil. These accusations and actions of others including those closest to Jesus, exposes their failing to sense and understand the Spirit of God in Jesus. And in contrast, it is those who have experienced the Spirit in Jesus, who Jesus suggests do the will of God, who Jesus sees as his true family, in his house.

We watched the film "Nomadland" recently. The film has received numerous awards, including Oscars for best picture, director, actress and more. It is based on the 2017 non-fiction book by the same title, written by Jessica Bruder, subtitled, "Surviving America in the Twenty-first Century." It is the story of elders living transient lives by necessity and choice, traveling across

the US in vans and campers and RVs as their homes, and finding community together. The film includes people who were interviewed for Bruder's book, who join the cast as themselves, and includes documentary footage of interviews of the people and of their gatherings.

There is more than one scene in which the main character, Fern, played by Frances McDormand, meets people from her past, neighbours and family who question her living in a van, many offering to help. A young person who Fern used to tutor, asks, "Are you homeless?" Fern answers, "I am houseless. You understand the difference. Right?" "Yes," the young person answers and understands. And Fern's sister, settled in a beautiful home and who helps when Fern's van needs major repairs, speaks about Fern's courage, and her life of wandering, living closer to the earth, more simply and freely in contrast to the way others perceive her nomadic life. The film challenges the idea that those who live this life are simply "out of their minds," or possessed by wanderlust, exploring instead what is life-giving, including in the actual lives of the characters, Linda May, Swankie, Bob and others. Whose perceptions of life and what is of value are compelling, as is the community of nomads and their dignity and care for one another; while recognizing also, the complexities of pain and loss for many, and the reality of most having little choice, living on limited income, with few housing options, in a nation and world that is more like "a house divided against itself."

It reminded me of Jesus' life, a nomadic life, traveling, helping, and healing people. Seen as "out of his mind" by some, his family fearing he needed to be "restrained," and in contrast finding community, family, among those who experience Jesus, and themselves through him, as filled with the Spirit.

Victoria, BC, where I live, has a significant number of people living without houses. This includes people in vans and RVs often looking for places where they can safely and legally park. Others are in tents in city parks, all of them especially impacted by the pandemic. Many are Indigenous and other racialized and queer people, people differently abled and with physical and mental health those affected by poverty and homelessness which the pandemic has further exposed. Greater efforts by government and non-government organizations to provide adequate housing have helped some, but the circumstances are complex and challenging. What is clear, is that for most there is little or no choice for housing and they are left living and wandering on the street. It is the failure of our social systems and the need for adequate basic income, and the necessary support systems for those who are marginalized. It is the failure to dismantle racist and colonial systems that confine people to disadvantage, poverty, homelessness, struggle, and pain. A small positive step recently is the creation of a village of 30 tiny container homes, built by a developer with community donations, that opened three weeks ago. The clean, safe, accessible, and affordable housing is not perfect. It is located on a parking lot and some in the community resisted it being in their neighbourhood. Others put up signs of welcome. And for those who now occupy these homes, some of whom were interviewed by local media, to have a home is a great relief and opportunity and source of hope. Darren, who was just moving into what he said was like a five-star hotel compared to where he was sheltering in the local park, was quoted in the paper saying, "I have a place over my head, and now I can actually move forward in my life."

Some might conclude you are out of your mind if you think we can create communities where there is no longer homelessness, where everyone has a basic living income, where there is equity in opportunities for everyone and adequate support for those more challenged, and all have enough - food, shelter, safety, healthcare, support. But who could imagine anything less in a country as wealthy as Canada, or in a world where there is enough for everyone? Would Jesus be imagining and enacting just this kind of healing and wholeness in our time, exorcizing demons of disproportionate wealth created on the backs of the disadvantaged. Would Jesus be perceived as out of his mind and needing to be restrained before he overturns everything by the Spirit of God that is in him?

In the reading today from first Samuel, the people of Israel want a king like their neighbours. Samuel seeks God's counsel, and understands the people are rejecting God's sovereignty in favour of human hierarchy and power. And as God directs, Samuel warns the people of the tyranny of any human sovereign or system over their lives with words that seem timeless and pertinent to what can happen in our or any time when we are out of our minds and possessed by demons of fear, scarcity, protection, and power leading ultimately to a house divided against itself that cannot stand. And it is precisely these demons and their destruction of people that Jesus confronts.

And isn't it precisely these powers that we as God's people of the church of Christ Jesus are called to confront, to challenge and by God's Spirit within us and others, change! for the healing and wellbeing of all God's children and all God's creation? It is a great and daunting calling for the church to follow this way of Jesus. What might my or our voice or small actions do to make this kind of change in our communities and world possible?

To quote the reading from second Corinthians today, "Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture – 'I believed, and so I spoke' – we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. 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. So we do not lose heart..."

Jesus went home. And so we gather, even online, near and far, by this grace, as Jesus' family, in the household of saints, to continue Jesus' revolutionary work of binding the strong man to join in God's healing and wholeness for all God's wonderful, weary, wandering, people. We join our voices, our actions, our financial support with others across the ELCIC, with ecumenical, international, multifaith and community partners and organizations and individuals, with our neighbours, as one household of faith, in this common work of the Spirit that is in Jesus, that is in us, by "the steadfast love of God that endures forever." Some may say we are out of our minds or the devil's got hold of us. But we do not lose hope. Seeking to do the will of God as Jesus' own family. Let it be so. In all our relations. Amen.