

LENT III 2014
SERMON – CHRIST CHURCH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
EPHESIANS 5.1 LUKE 11.14, HYMN 536

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YOUR MOTHER MUST BE VERY PROUD OF YOU
SHOUTS A WOMAN IN THE CROWD...

Jesus, of course, does not dispute her Jewish motherly enthusiasm and responds, *BETTER YET, HOW FORTUNATE ARE THOSE WHO GRASP GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE AND ACTUALLY PUT IT INTO PRACTICE IN THEIR LIVES!*

TURN BACK...The hymn just concluded parallels a bumper sticker from a 'highly experienced' old black pickup truck I used to see regularly...by itself the bumper sticker might be seen as amusingly eccentric... notable, however was the truck was a moving collection of religious bumper stickers qualified for *RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT...*MY FAVORITE – THE LENTEN THEME - **BOLDLY STATED...I'D TURN BACK IF I WERE YOU**

Jesus demands concentration on PERMANENT improvement. The Good News is we can **TURN BACK...**the Bad News is if we don't take strong measures, things will get worse...!

Today's Gospel tells us precisely why...

Jesus is doing something that consistently produces nervous laughter and lurching change in dinner table conversation...driving out a demon to cure a man's inability to speak. Then readily called Demonic Possession, both Jews and Gentiles saw this as a very real problem...unlike today when the diagnosis is likely to something more dismissively benign such as *HE'S JUST CRAZY...OR...THAT WHOLE FAMILY IS STRANGE.*

Jesus dealt with a very real problem...dramatically improving the man's life...performing an exorcism...again, one of those often discomfiting terms that make people look for someone else with whom to converse.

...WHEN THE MAN BEGAN TO TALK...PEOPLE WERE AMAZED. THEY ASKED...IS IT BEELZEBUB, THE CHIEF DEMON WHO EMPOWERS YOU TO DO THIS.

THEN, SAID JESUS...*IT IS BY THE POWER OF GOD THAT I DRIVE OUT DEMONS...THIS DEMONSTRATES GOD'S MERCY RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU...*

Jesus seizes the opportunity to make another point...about negative behaviors repeating if not permanently fixed...

WHEN A PROBLEM LEAVES A PERSON, IT SEARCHES FOR A NEW HOME. IF IT CANNOT FIND ONE, IT RETURNS WITH SEVEN EVEN WORSE PROBLEMS THAN BEFORE. IN THE END THAT PERSON IS IN EVEN WORSE SHAPE THAN AT THE BEGINNING."

The point is...if we pay attention to what God wants – **DO THINGS THAT HELP OURSELVES** - don't get involved with things that corrupt our life; guard constantly against letting old problems creep back...life will be good. Let negative things take our focus and, conversely, life will be worse than ever.

These are not just abstract concepts of the ancient world. Today they permeate and corrupt our culture at all levels...families, business, government and, yes, in some situations the Church...you may have found them in your own house! Meditate about those **YOU** need to drive away...it's not too late to make it an individual Lenten concentration.

How to proceed...? **DO NOT** simply treat the Gospel as a metaphor...a clean house is important...**BUT...**the broom must not just be applied to the floor looking for some creature in a red suit with a pitchfork...we must use it on the mirror...the Devil has many faces...often found in the mirror...Jesus has only one face, one personality...our call is to look for him in the mirror...He is our role model...be like him...

Profoundly concludes Saint Paul in today's letter to the Ephesians...

ABANDON ANY INVOLVEMENT WITH BEHAVIORS LIKE THE CHILDREN OF DISOBEDIENCE...WAKE UP...ARISE FROM DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR, TAKE ACTION... WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT...

TURN BACK...!

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