

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Our Gospel text begins with the word καὶ; it means “and” but our ESV translates it “then” in this verse that begins our text. That’s not bad, and it gives us the clue. Something has been happening to get such a reaction from Jesus’ family and from the Jewish leaders. What was happening? He healed a paralytic, for one thing; that amazed the people and caused them to say, “*We have never seen anything like this before!*” Authoritative teaching, for another, that challenged the *status quo*. If only Jesus had played nicely. He healed a man with “*a withered hand*”; he exercised power over unclean spirits—to silence them and cast them out. Wow. Who is this guy? We heard from Nicodemus last week: Jesus must be “*a teacher come from God, for no one [could] do these signs that [He did] unless God [was] with him.*”

But wait. “*He eats with sinners and tax collectors—He even has a tax collector as one of His disciples. His disciples don’t fast. Instead they pick grain on the Sabbath — not supposed to work on the Sabbath, you know. And Jesus Himself heals on the Sabbath. He doesn’t follow the rules —our Sabbath rules,*” the Pharisees thought. “*Who made Him ‘Lord of the Sabbath’? He’s a sinner! He must be! Listen to Him forgive sins—no one can do that but God alone! Who does He think He is? He lets those unclean spirits call Him ‘the Son of God,’ and He doesn’t correct them. Worst of all: the people are flocking to Him. He is a threat to our authority,*” the Pharisees thought, and they didn’t like it. That’s why Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came to Jesus in last week’s Gospel under the cover of darkness.

The Pharisees wondered: “*How do you deal with people like Jesus: who don’t play by the agreed-upon rules that keep us in power? We’d really like to kill Him—stone Him for blasphemy, because He says He’s ‘the Son of God,’ and He says, ‘I and the Father are one’ . But we can’t do that—the people wouldn’t allow that. Look at all the works He’s doing.*

“*I know. Let’s discredit Him. Let’s make Him out to be insane. His family’s not happy with Him. Let’s get them to say, ‘He’s out of His mind.’ Then maybe His own family will take care of Him for us.*

“*Or maybe we can make Him out to be demon-possessed, or say, ‘He’s doing all this by the power of Beelzebul or by the prince of demons.’ Then no one will listen to Him and people will stop flocking after Him.*”

If this strategy sounds familiar, it’s because Satan used it first: “*did God really say?*” And Adam used it: “*the woman you gave me*”; and the woman used it: “*the serpent deceived me.*” If it sounds familiar, it’s because modern politicians

on all sides still use the same tried and true methods as the Pharisees against their opponents: twist words. Pick and choose words. Quote words out of context. Discredit, demonize, destroy reputations. Why do politicians use negative advertising when the public says they don't like it? Because it works. If all this sounds familiar, it's because we use it too! We tell lies about our neighbor, slander him, betray him and hurt his reputation. And we don't defend him, speak well of him and explain everything in the kindest way. You know those words. It's Eighth commandment stuff. It doesn't matter that everyone's doing it. It's against God's law! We're guilty! Repent!

The fact is, this was used against Jesus—He's crazy; He's demon-possessed, etc. The Pharisees were already holding counsel against Jesus, trying to figure out how to destroy Him—and in a way, it worked on Him, too. Oh, it took some time, and more outrageous things that Jesus did: like raising Lazarus from the dead and entering into Jerusalem as King and causing a ruckus in the temple. And it took someone on the inside betraying Him—but they did it. They got Jesus arrested and brought forth false witnesses to twist words and lie and demonize. They sentenced Him to death, but that wasn't sufficient. They had to get the governor to carry out the sentence, and that meant turning the people against Him. And they did that, too—He's not our king; Caesar is; release Barabbas; crucify Jesus.

And He was. Crucified, dead, and buried. A stone was rolled over the opening to His tomb, and sealed, and a guard was placed there, to make sure His disciples don't go around and use the same lying methods we just did—to make sure "*his disciples [don't] go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead.'*" That "*fraud,*" they said, "*[would] be worse than the first.*"

But you know it wasn't a fraud. All that Jesus said and taught was true. Jesus' works bear witness to it—including His resurrection. And Jesus didn't do these mighty wonders as one possessed by Beelzebul—as if Satan would give up even one whom he has snared in the ancient curse. No, neither Satan nor his kingdom is divided against itself. Nicodemus was right: Jesus did all this as one "*come from God.*" Jesus was truly the Son of God, as the demons knew and as Jesus Himself said. Jesus is He "*whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world*" [John 10.]

Jesus was sent into the world as "*the stronger man.*" He is the all-powerful Son of God sent to bind the strong man, Satan, the prince of this world. Jesus is that long-promised Seed of Woman, sent to crush the ancient serpent's head. Jesus has done it. He did it enduring secret plots and false accusations. He did it enduring treacherous betrayal and cowardly denial. He did it enduring humiliation and mockery and torture. He did it enduring the cross scorning its shame. He did it, proclaiming our forgiveness and Satan's defeat: "*it is finished.*" He did it as He

tied the last knot in Satan's bonds, as He stomped on the head of that ancient serpent, as He swallowed up death in victory.

For with a victory banner in hand, Jesus, brought back to life on the third day, descended into hell—as we confessed today in the Apostles' Creed. He entered into the strong man's fortress and proclaimed His victory. He plundered the strong man's house, fulfilling what Isaiah said: *“proclaiming liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”*

Moreover, His victory is ours through faith in Christ Jesus, so that we can say to the unclean spirits, *“make room for the Holy Spirit”* as we command them to *“come out of and depart from a servant of Jesus Christ”* as we did for Waylen today, and then poured water over him, washing away his sins, pulling him out of Satan's clutches, joining him to Christ Jesus and His church. The victory is ours in Christ Jesus. That's why He continues to be proclaimed in His Church to this day—He suffered for you; He rose again on the third day for you. It's why He continues to give the Holy Spirit, who leads you to *“repentance,”* who causes you to believe that *“forgiveness of sins”* is yours *“in his name,”* who comforts you with the knowledge that in Christ you cannot be guilty of an eternal sin.

Jesus' victory is ours through faith in Him. It's why we continue to teach and *“observe all that He has commanded.”* We do not pick and choose which words of Jesus we like and which ones we don't. There is no Jesus who was a good teacher apart from the Jesus who is the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep. There is no Jesus who was a good man apart from the Jesus who truly is the Son of God. There is no Jesus the moral teacher apart from Jesus the Savior, the Christ, the Lamb who was slain but who lives and reigns, apart from the forgiver of sins, the giver of life. There is no Jesus but the Jesus proclaimed in the whole of the Holy Scriptures by the Holy Spirit.

So that, trusting in this Jesus, you *“do not lose heart,”* but are comforted by the Spirit. The Stronger man has come for you; He has come to defeat your enemies. He has come to forgive all your sins; that's right: ALL of them, covered by Jesus' blood. When you trust Jesus, you have not committed the sin that *“never has forgiveness.”* And one day, the Stronger man will come again in glory to *“raise you up and bring you into His presence.”* He will come again to take you to God's own house, *“a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,”* to the room He has prepared for you. He will come to take you to the *“glory beyond all comparison.”*

Until then, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.