

Sermon
Sunday, June 6, 2021
Rev. Brian Dixon
Mark 3:20-35

I am grateful to be here with you on this Sunday morning. I was more than happy to preach when your rector Emily asked me to do so. However, I should have paid more attention to the text for this Sunday. Because I had no idea that I'd be agreeing to preach on Satan. But here we are. Satan, Beelzebub. Demons casting out Demons. You don't know me, but let me just make a confession: I don't put much stock in the notion of a physical devil. You know red, long tail, pointy ears, pitchfork. I honestly think the whole notion is a bit crazy. And Jesus sounds a bit crazy to me as well. Which I am not alone. It seems that his family thought he was crazy too. And the scribes thought he was crazy. And he really didn't do much to prove them wrong. He rattled off several things that did in fact make him sound a bit unhinged. Also, he wasn't even eating. And another thing you should know about me is if I'm not eating, I'm also crazy. I don't miss meals. I love to eat. I am a creature of habit; I eat at the same time every day. And if I don't eat, I can get a little irritable. And maybe that is what happened to Jesus. Maybe he was just hungry or hangry as I like to say, maybe his blood sugar was low. Or maybe he wasn't. Maybe he was trying to say something very specific.

On this Trinity Sunday, as we think of the divine-three-in-one. What we are really thinking about is an image of God. Or images of God, and Jesus is an image of God. We like to portray Jesus as some kind of superhero. He has to be strong and mighty like one of those Roman soldiers we see portrayed in the movies. Remember that movie that Mel Gibson made. I read an interview he did when he was promoting his movie, *The Passion of The Christ*. He said that Jesus, as presented in his movie, was not some wimpy Christ like we'd seen in all the other movies. Jesus would be strong and macho and manly. Gibson's comments were not only offensive from a feminist perspective and as we know often antisemitic, but they were offensive from what I believe to be a Christian perspective.

But we can't place all the blame on Mel Gibson for portraying Jesus as some tough, macho guy taking out Pharisees and Sadducees who get in his way. There was a song on a country music station, and I don't know if this was the name of the song or just the lyrics in the refrain, but the verses talked about a father or a brother or someone and then the chorus followed with that he was tougher than nails and he overcame defeat. Which that is bad enough, but one of the verses was talking about Jesus and that he was tougher than nails. Get it, that the nails on the cross didn't hurt him because he was tougher than nails. Well, I'm sorry but I just felt this was going too far, to actually suggest that Jesus was not affected by physical pain, that he was some massive towering being who didn't feel pain like the rest of humankind. So I spent a while in the car just fuming over how mixed up our whole society and to some extent our faith has become over the identity of Jesus. We as a country have become so obsessed with power and might. We enter war to smite evildoers. Our former president's goal was to appear tough and strong and manly! No one is talking about being humble as a nation, no one is talking about being servants to the hungriest, poorest of nations. It's instead, (SING THE SUPERHERO ADVANCE MUSIC-HERE WE COME TO SAVE THE DAY) America to the rescue.

But Jesus did not come to be a mighty soldier; Jesus came to overturn our notion of power and might. He did not spend his time with the most powerful, but at times the most marginalized. He was not spending time with those that would be the most respectable. Jesus wasn't supporting systems of power and decency and normalcy, the scribes, the pharisees, his own family, instead Jesus was looking to overturn those very systems. If Jesus were here today, where would he be? Would he even be here? Here in this room? Would Jesus be an Episcopalian? Seems unlikely. Instead, I think Jesus would be out in the streets. Jesus would be looking for ways to dismantle white supremacy, Jesus would be walking with the transgender woman who fears for her life. Jesus was and would continue to cast his lot with the sex worker. We like to believe that Jesus is on our side and perhaps Jesus is. Perhaps we are squarely within the movement of the Spirit. But what if we are not. What if we are continuing to lift up the very systems that Jesus was seeking to overturn. The systems that continue to keep us in power. We are continuing to participate in systems in which we don't have to give anything up. We remain silent about privilege and white supremacy because we continue to benefit from those systems. What if we are silent because speaking out would mean speaking out to our very family. And we think we would be turning our back on the ones who loved and raised us. Would be turning our backs on the church that nurtured us. If we are not continually looking to overturn systems and to expand our view of the people that God loves. If we continue to center ourselves instead of the spirit and love of God then as our text says today we are committing blasphemy. I heard an interview with Jose Andres this week. Jose Andres is a Chef and the Founder of World Central Kitchen. World Central Kitchen goes wherever people are hungry and feeds them. He just got back from India and he is going to Gaza. World Central Kitchen feeds people all over the world. He said something that stuck with me: We need longer tables not higher walls. Longer tables not higher walls. Are we making longer tables or continuing to build higher walls?

Jesus wasn't crazy. No, he was saying: I will not continue to build walls. I'll make longer tables. I'll welcome everyone in. I'll put at the center of my focus those who don't look like me. And that is our invitation. And so I'll leave you with this poem. It was written by Aracelis Girmay, a black woman and poet. You've heard enough of the words I've written, of words written by a white guy. It's time for me to get out of the way and let you hear from another voice. She wrote this poem in January 2017, when many people but especially people of color were fearing for what a new president, a system of power and might, would bring. The systems that would be elevated, that would continue to oppress and to kill. And so she penned these words: It's called "you are who I love"

You Are Who I Love¹
Aracelis Girmay
You, selling roses out of a silver grocery cart
You, in the park, feeding the pigeons
You cheering for the bees

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You with cats in your voice in the morning, feeding cats
You protecting the river You are who I love
delivering babies, nursing the sick
You with henna on your feet and a gold star in your nose
You taking your medicine, reading the magazines
You looking into the faces of young people as they pass, smiling and saying, *Alright!* which,
they know it, means *I see you, Family. I love you. Keep on.*
You dancing in the kitchen, on the sidewalk, in the subway waiting for the train because
Stevie Wonder, Héctor Lavoe, La Lupe
You stirring the pot of beans, you, washing your father's feet
You are who I love, you
reciting Darwish, then June
Feeding your heart, teaching your parents how to do The Dougie, counting to 10, reading
your patients' charts
You are who I love, changing policies, standing in line for water, stocking the food pantries,
making a meal
You are who I love, writing letters, calling the senators, you who, with the seconds of your
body (with your *time* here), arrive on buses, on trains, in cars, by foot to stand in the
January streets against the cool and brutal offices, saying: YOUR CRUELTY DOES NOT
SPEAK FOR ME
You are who I love, you struggling to see
You struggling to love or find a question
You better than me, you kinder and so blistering with anger, you are who I love, standing in
the wind, salvaging the umbrellas, graduating from school, wearing holes in your shoes
You are who I love
weeping or touching the faces of the weeping
You, Violeta Parra, grateful for the alphabet, for sound, singing toward us in the dream
You carrying your brother home
You noticing the butterflies
Sharing your water, sharing your potatoes and greens
You who did and did not survive
You who cleaned the kitchens
You who built the railroad tracks and roads
You who replanted the trees, listening to the work of squirrels and birds, you are who I love
You whose blood was taken, whose hands and lives were taken, with or without your
saying
Yes, I mean to give. You are who I love.
You who the borders crossed
You whose fires
You decent with rage, so in love with the earth
You writing poems alongside children
You cactus, water, sparrow, crow You, my elder
You are who I love,
summoning the courage, making the cobbler,
getting the blood drawn, sharing the difficult news, you always planting the marigolds,
learning to walk wherever you are, learning to read wherever you are, you baking the

bread, you come to me in dreams, you kissing the faces of your dead wherever you are,
speaking to your children in your mother's languages, tooting the birds
You are who I love, behind the library desk, leaving who might kill you, crying with the love
songs, polishing your shoes, lighting the candles, getting through the first day despite the
whisperers sniping fail fail fail
You are who I love, you who beat and did not beat the odds, you who knows that any good
thing you have is the result of someone else's sacrifice, work, you who fights for
reparations
You are who I love, you who stands at the courthouse with the sign that reads NO JUSTICE,
NO PEACE
You are who I love, singing Leonard Cohen to the snow, you with glitter on your face,
wearing a kilt and violet lipstick
You are who I love, sighing in your sleep
You, playing drums in the procession, you feeding the chickens and humming as you hem
the skirt, you sharpening the pencil, you writing the poem about the loneliness of the
astronaut
You wanting to listen, you trying to be so still
You are who I love, mothering the dogs, standing with horses
You in brightness and in darkness, throwing your head back as you laugh, kissing your
hand
You carrying the berbere from the mill, and the jug of oil pressed from the olives of the
trees you belong to
You studying stars, you are who I love
braiding your child's hair
You are who I love, crossing the desert and trying to cross the desert
You are who I love, working the shifts to buy books, rice, tomatoes,
bathing your children as you listen to the lecture, heating the kitchen with the oven, up
early, up late
You are who I love, learning English, learning Spanish, drawing flowers on your hand with a
ballpoint pen, taking the bus home
You are who I love, speaking plainly about your pain, sucking your teeth at the airport
terminal television every time the politicians say something that offends your sense of
decency, of thought, which is often
You are who I love, throwing your hands up in agony or disbelief, shaking your head,
arguing back, out loud or inside of yourself, holding close your incredulity which, yes, too, I
love I love
your working heart, how each of its gestures, tiny or big, stand beside my own agony,
building a forest there
How "Fuck you" becomes a love song
You are who I love, carrying the signs, packing the lunches, with the rain on your face
You at the edges and shores, in the rooms of quiet, in the rooms of shouting, in the airport
terminal, at the bus depot saying "No!" and each of us looking out from the gorgeous
unlikelihood of our lives at all, finding ourselves here, witnesses to each other's tenderness,
which, this moment, is fury, is rage, which, this moment, is another way of saying: *You are
who I love You are who I love You and you and you are who*

