



“A House Divided”

Rev. Dr. Michael L. Gregg

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Mark 3:20-35

How many of you know that if you are right handed, you can't really hit a golf ball with left handed clubs? You see, my grandfather and father were excellent golfers and they are both left-handed. I, of course, am right handed. I wanted to play golf like them so badly that I could feel the ping of a purely struck golf ball reverberating in my head. But, alas, I am terrible at golf. My father would take me to the driving range to hit a bucket of balls and it seemed that I had a unique talent of making a golf ball go behind me when I hit it forward.

Well, as a young boy with absolutely no common sense, I decided that I wanted to practice at home hitting golf balls off of my driveway. So, as a right-hander, I grabbed my father's left-handed driver and went out to practice my Paul Azinger swing and Chi-Chi Rodriguez sword celebration. I placed the golf ball on the driveway, took my time to set up the drive, lined up the backwards end of the driver to the ball, closed my eyes, and heard the “thud” of the butt end of the driver making contact. I opened my eyes just for the split second that it took for the ball... to make this wicked slice straight through the window of my next neighbor's house. I decided against doing my Chi-Chi Rodriguez sword celebration that day. My parents were going to be ticked! So, I honed my inherent jewel thief ability to get the ball out of the dual paned window before the neighbors got home. I figured, no golf ball, no evidence, and I'm in the clear.

Apparently, a broken window is much more obvious than I thought it would be. A couple hours later, my mother found me playing in my room and asked if I had anything to do with the broken window next door. Seeing the hurt and anger in her eyes, tied to the fact the somehow mothers seem to know everything anyway, I confessed what I had done. I confessed because my relationship with my mother had changed. I wanted everything out in the open. If I had let this lie settle between us like a dense fog then I would never have experienced an unfettered and unfiltered relationship with my mother. My confession was not about my sin, but about my relationship with the one who was to forgive me.

Well, confession. This might make us stir in our seats a little bit. We become like the woman who told her pastor one Sunday, “That was a wonderful sermon. Everything you said applies to someone I know.” Confession is not appealing because it carries with it a sense of denial regarding our own sin... and usually someone else is a bigger sinner...aren't they?

In 1886, Robert Lewis Stevenson wrote a well-known novel, “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” with the focus on the opposing nature of right/wrong, joy/despair, and good/evil. He called us to realize the dark side inherent in everyone. Another famous storyteller, Mark Twain, put it this way, “We are like the moon. We also have a dark side we want no one else to see.” Well, Mr. Twain, no need to sugar coat it for us. And the apostle Paul didn't either. He said in Romans, “There is no

difference, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” It seems that we have always been a divided people... divided in our souls, in our homes, and in our lives.

Like my greatly unintelligent golf game, it wasn't the action of shattering the window that caused the most damage; it was the shattered relationship with my mother that made my refusal to confess so toxic. The way that sin separates us from the Divine is that it breaks and shatters our relationships: with our spouses, our children, our parents, our co-workers, our friends... with God. Like that woman leaving the church on that Sunday morning, there is truth in the claim that we prefer to travel down the road of least resistance and look at someone else's problems rather than our own. It is easier to live in a divided and dilapidated house rather than put in the sweat and struggle to patch holes, mend fences, and shore up the foundation.

Broken and divided relationships ping and reverberate in our heads when we refuse to confront the ways we lie to each other, refuse to confess our sins, refuse to reach out in reparative redemption. We need to confront our own fears, lies, missteps, and mistakes, before we can understand the purposes of God for us. We need to confess to one another in order to heal and be changed. We need to trust one another in order to acquire a new perspective. We need to love one another in order to repair our divisions. If we don't, we will continue to live in a divided house, a divided nation, a divided world.

Sometimes, the best thing we can do to repair our divided house is to get out into the world and learn about our neighbors, learn about other perspectives, learn about other people's lives. One way to repair our divided home is to host a Ramadan dinner and share a meal with our Muslim friends. Another way to repair our divided home is to go to Hope Supply and sort diapers for kids who need extra love and care. And yet another way to repair our divided home is to offer sanctuary and safety to immigrants and their families. It is important that we find ways to repair our divided house.

Often, we live in divided houses of damaged beliefs and degraded ideas because we refuse to leave the false safety of our insulated tribes and our protected ways of being. As we try to repair the relationships we have with each other and as we begin to listen and learn from one another, we must seek to rebuild the foundations of our ideologies and habits. The late Anthony Bourdain, foodie and travel guru, said, “If I'm an advocate for anything, it's to move. As far as you can, as much as you can. Across the ocean, or simply across the river. The extent to which you can walk in someone else's shoes or at least eat their food, it's a plus for everybody.” When we can realize that it takes a team to build a solid house and that it takes cooperation and care, we just might figure out how to become unified rather than divided.

But when we start to talk like this, when we seek to build bridges rather than live in divided houses, we can often sound crazy. And that's exactly what the crowd and Jesus' family thought about him. Jesus' own flesh and blood, the mother who gave birth to the savior, his siblings who witnessed him teaching in the synagogue, the crowd who saw him work miracles, they all wondered if he was out of his mind. Jesus was simply trying to go in the house and eat a meal in peace, but even that house would be divided among those who believed Jesus was from God and those who that he was from Satan. Preaching and proclaiming the new realm of God can often sound crazy when living within a divided and broken world.

But even as Christians, we aren't immune to the power of division, disagreement, and discord. As people of faith, we are all the more called to confession and reconciliation. Tradition claims that Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre is built over the cave in which Christ is said to have been buried. In July of 2002 the church became the scene of ugly fighting between the monks who ran it. The conflict began when a Coptic monk sitting on the rooftop decided to move his chair into the shade. This took him into the part of the rooftop courtyard looked after by the Ethiopian monks. It turns out that the Ethiopian and Coptic monks had been arguing over the rooftop of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for centuries. In 1752 the Ottoman Sultan issued an edict declaring which parts of the Church belong to each of six Christian groups: the Latins, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Copts, and Ethiopians. Despite the edict, conflict over the church still remains to this day.

In 1970 the Ethiopians gained control of the rooftop when the Coptic monks were absent for a short period. And they have been sitting there ever since, with at least one Ethiopian monk always remaining on the roof to assert their rights. In response a Coptic monk has been living on the roof also, to maintain the claim of the Copts. And so, we get to an ordinary Monday in July 2002, when the Coptic monk moved his chair into the shade. Harsh words led to pushes, then shoves, until an all-out brawl was going, including the throwing of chairs and iron bars. At the end of the fight eleven of the monks were injured, including one monk who was unconscious in the hospital and another that had a broken arm. We see that the church which serves as a memorial to Christ and even our own churches where we are the body of Christ can be the scene for such bitter conflict and aggression. This is a far cry from Christ's continuing call to love one another, turn the other cheek, and his persistent prayer that his followers might "be one" and live in unity. Even in churches today we are a house divided.

This division and inner conflict is a reality of today's churches, of our world, and also in our lives. Families are divided by incarcerated parents and children taken at the border. A nation is divided resulting in rancorous politics and unbridled arrogance. An economy is divided causing extreme poverty and systemic injustice. A community is divided leading to individualism and tribalism, prejudice and violence. When humanity is divided, all of this can happen and we end up living in a divided world.

We all know what it is like to live divided lives. You know those times when your actions don't match up with your faith? When who you are on the inside doesn't match the outside? That's what it means to be a house divided. You might be one person at work another at home. You might act one way with certain people and a different way with other people. "Life gets divided into pieces. Behavior, beliefs, and ethics become situational. There is the work life, the family life, the prayer life, the personal life, the social life. Pretty soon we're left with a bunch of pieces." Pretty soon we are divided.

And once we are divided, it seems that we are constantly and frustratingly trying to put the pieces of our lives back together. I think that is why the crowd had gathered around Jesus. That was why the religious authorities opposed him. That was why his family tried to subdue him. In their own way they were trying to put the pieces of their lives back together. But the pieces didn't fit. Jesus was teaching them about the new realm of God. The old, divided reality was

going to be no more and a new one was ready to be built. The house would no longer be divided because a savior had come to stretch out his arms and unite a broken world.

And Jesus on the cross always stands before us as the image of unity, wholeness, redemption, and life. His sacrifice puts our lives and houses back in order. Jesus offers a different image of what life might look like. He does so by revealing the division in our lives, the houses that cannot stand, and the crumbling of our kingdoms. Jesus reveals that the beginning of wholeness and unity is confession. It is acknowledging our brokenness and that our house is divided. We must confess that we have created conflict and division within our relationships. We must confess that we have kindled cruelty in our nation. We must confess that we have fostered discontent in our families. We must confess that we have not loved all that God has created. And when we do confess, God will bridge our divided lives, will repair our divided homes, will heal our divided land, and will love our divided souls.

Just like I found out as a young golfer, confession changes us. Confession frees us. Confession restores our relationship with God and with each other. Confession unites our house, our nation, and our world. We are called to love and support each other and those in the community who need our unified and dedicated presence. Let us not be a house divided against itself. Let us not be divided anymore. And I hope, that as we do so, we might be able to say, "That was a wonderful sermon today. Everything you said applies to me."

Amen.