

Mark 3:20-35; Genesis 3:8-15

In 1972 there was a bank robbery in Stockholm, Sweden. Employees of the bank were held as captives for six days by the robbers. During this time something happened within the minds of the captives which caused them to embrace their captors. When the police came to rescue them, the bank employees resisted the police, and when these employees were asked to testify against the robbers in court, they refused to do so.

Psychiatrists now call this phenomenon Stockholm Syndrome - the falling in love with one's kidnapper. Yet it goes back much farther than 1972 Stockholm. We trace it back to our Gospel reading for today in Mark 3, and even as far back as the Garden of Eden.

We begin with Jesus' parable: "*No one can enter a strong man's house,*" He says in our text, "*and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man.*" The strong man is Satan. His house is filled with captives. Satan kidnapped the human race. He entered God's holy house, the Garden of Eden, in the form of a serpent and plundered it, taking captive Adam and Eve and all their children. To be born into this world, therefore, is to be born into Satan, the strong man's house.

We enter in as his captives. We are trophies up on his shelf. Our kidnapper is pure evil. He has no love in his heart or anywhere in his entire being. He is the absence of love; the absence of goodness and pity; the complete opposite of God.

And because our God is filled with love and pity, He does not stand idly by, but He acts to rescue those whom Satan has taken captive. Jesus came to plunder the house of the strong man. But before He could do this, He first had to bind the strong man. And so we see Jesus going from town to town driving out demons. He speaks with authority and the strong man is bound and tied. Now Jesus can plunder his house and rescue the captives.

But what if the captives do not want to be rescued? It's that Stockholm Syndrome long before there ever was a Stockholm. Look at the scribes in our text. They side with Satan against Jesus. "*(You) drive out demons,*" they cry, "*by the prince of demons!*" They accuse Jesus of being evil. They take their stand with the devil and attack the one who is trying to rescue them.

But they're not the first, nor are they the last. Adam and Eve did this in the Garden of Eden. The serpent kidnapped them, tempting them to disobey God. And then when God comes to rescue them, they run and hide. Adam and Eve feel safer with Satan than with God. They see God as their enemy and the devil as their friend.

This is pure lunacy. What can explain this? It's sin. It's what sin does. It turns us away from our rescuer to embrace our kidnapper. Rather than calling it the Stockholm Syndrome, we could call it the Syndrome of Sin. It affects all who are sinners; all who are born of Adam and Eve.

Sometimes we see it displayed in its extreme form, like when people avoid the church as if it was hell itself, and the pastor a demon dressed in a white robe. Such people are actually replicating

our first parents in Eden. When God comes here into His holy house to rescue sinners, like Adam and Eve, they run and hide.

Yet this Syndrome of Sin is not just seen in such as these. It dwells within all of us. As long as sin lives in us, which it will until we die, we are tempted in the same way as Adam and Eve were, and as were the scribes in our text.

Jesus is our rescuer, but He does not rescue us except through the means that He has established. He rescues us from the house of the strong man through Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, Holy Absolution - through His Holy Gospel. We who are poor, weak sinners are tempted, therefore, to resist these holy means by which Jesus would rescue us.

We are tempted to not fully embrace Holy Baptism. One way, for example, is to refrain from making the sign of the holy cross over us, when all this is, is a reminder of our baptism. We are tempted to not fully embrace Holy Communion; tempted to not see the Supper as our loyal friend but to be suspicious of it; not desiring it like we should, but thinking that too much of it is bad for us, even though this meal is simply Jesus coming to rescue us. We are tempted to not fully embrace the Holy Gospel. Tempted to not pay attention when the Absolution is declared to us; tempted to not see the need to study God's holy words; to think that we can become too overzealous for the Bible even though Jesus pleads with us to make His words a part of us.

This syndrome, whatever we may call it, causes us to call good evil, and evil good. That which we need more than anything else we resist and stay away from, and that which is bad for us we embrace.

What is God to do with us? He desires to rescue us, but we show that we do not want to be rescued. We're like our first parents. God came to rescue Adam and Eve, but Adam told Him, "Not me, it's that woman who is to blame; speak with her!" And Eve told God, "It's not me either, it's that serpent; speak to him!" So what does God do...get angry? No. He proclaims the Gospel. He will send a Savior; one who is born of woman to crush the serpent's head; to bind the strong man and plunder his house.

You see, God rescues those who see Him as their enemy. He loves those who run from Him. He has pity on those who hide from Him. And He dies for those who want no part of Him. And so today God is here to rescue you. Repent therefore. No more running away from Him. No more hiding. He is not your foe but your friend. He is not against you. He is not your punisher but your deliverer. Have you not been embracing Him? Do not fear. He embraces you in love. He forgives you. For everything wrong you have done, He forgives you.

As you believe this, God the Holy Spirit will work in you so that you are driven to embrace Jesus; to embrace His holy means of rescue. You will resist sin and Satan and desire your rescuer. You will see evil as evil and good as good, and not confuse the two. But this is a lifetime of learning. For every day sin is right there with you, tempting you and me to embrace our kidnapper and resist our rescuer.

Keep in mind that although we are not stronger than the strong man, Jesus is. You do not have to be strong; just be in Christ. And you are. For He who loves you and forgives you has bound the strong man for you, to have you and keep you for His own now and forever. Amen.