



**VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

Indivisible

SCRIPTURE:
MARK
3:20-25

Oct. 20, 2024 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

So it may not come as a surprise to you, but Jesus Christ gets in trouble yet again. This is the third chapter of the Gospel of Mark in which there are 16 chapters. This is relatively early on in his public ministry. In fact, just before this passage, Jesus has identified the 12 disciples—the men who are going to follow him, along with the women, during the three and a half year journey of his ministry. He’s been preaching and teaching and healing and there’s a lot of attention coming to Jesus. Crowds now are gathering around him. He makes his way home—not to Nazareth, but a house in Capernaum. We think this actually is Peter’s home, Simon Peter, one of the disciples. There are so many people that crowd around and try to get close to Jesus that it says he can’t even take time to eat.

The disciples are concerned about Jesus and his ability to care for himself and to proclaim the gospel message. They’re trying to restrain him. It says in the text, “some scribes come from Jerusalem.” In Jesus’ day, scribes not only wrote down the law, they interpreted the law. They had great power. So scribes came from Jerusalem, at least a two- maybe three-day journey, and they confront Jesus and they say, “Who is casting out demons?” They say, “Jesus, you must be of Beelzebul,” which is Hebrew for the ruler of demons. You must be possessed by the ruler of demons. As you cast out demons, you yourself must be possessed by the ruler of demons. That’s when Jesus invokes two Proverbs parables. He says to them, well, that makes no sense because why would the ruler of demons cast out demons? “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.”

So we are in this sermon series about loving God and loving nation, and we’ve talked about being one nation under God. Today we’re talking about being

indivisible. Jesus says, “A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. A house divided against itself will not be able to stand.” Indivisible.

So I was talking to a friend of mine, a church historian, the Rev. Dr. Haruko Nawata Ward. She taught church history with me at Columbia Seminary for a number of years. I was bemoaning the fact that we are so divided as a nation and said to my friend, “I think we are more divided now as the United States, as a nation, than we’ve ever been.” That is a difficult thing to say to a church historian. She said, “Well, you know, there was a period from 1861 to 1865, I think, called the Civil War.” She reminded me during the Civil War in this nation, 620,000 Americans lost their lives. That’s more Americans lost than in World War I and II and the Vietnam War combined. She reminded me that there were 1.5 million casualties; that’s 5% of the nation’s population. Haruko reminded me that in those horrific four years we were fighting in our streets, in our fields, in our farms. “Yeah, it’s not right, Nishioka, to say we’ve never been more divided than this.” She also reminded me that in the 60s and 70s, during the Vietnam War, and the protests about the women’s rights movement, and the civil rights movement, the nation felt pretty divided at that point as well.

But into this moment, Jesus speaks and says, “If a kingdom is divided against itself, it cannot stand, and if a house is divided against itself, it will not be able to stand.” Talking about the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln himself quoted these verses. He was trying to be the Republican nominee for Senate for the state of Illinois. He was speaking to the Republican Party’s convention for Illinois—seeking the nomination to be the Senate candidate from the state of Illinois—two years before he would be elected as president of the United States. He said, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” He quoted the words of scripture

from Jesus Christ. Then President Lincoln said, “I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect we will have to cease being divided.”

It will become all one thing or all the other because a nation cannot remain divided. A house divided against itself cannot stand. One nation under God, indivisible. It feels that we are more divided than we’ve ever been. It calls into question: What does it mean to be indivisible? I’ve been helped by a book by that title, “Indivisible, How to Forge Our Differences into a Stronger Future,” written by Denise Hamilton. Hamilton writes this: “To be indivisible is to move through the world with a deep understanding of the value, strength, and beauty of others. It goes beyond knowledge. It is a practice of bridging differences. To understand that when we honor the humanity of others, we save ourselves and our nation.”

To be indivisible means we see one another in all of their humanity and we honor that humanity. Theologians would call this the *Imago Dei*—Latin for the image of God. Everyone you and I encounter, no matter who they’re voting for in a little over two weeks, no matter whose sign they have in their yard, no matter what sticker is on their car, whoever we encounter, deserves the respect and love of a basic human being created in the image of God. Every single person bears the image of God and is deserving of that respect and love and kindness—that basic human understanding—which all of us are seeking.

Last month we commemorated the 23rd anniversary of Sept. 11, 2001. That horrific day in this nation’s history, when we were attacked. Two planes took down the World Trade centers in New York City. One plane crashed into the Pentagon. The fourth plane, United Flight 93, was making its way from Boston to San Francisco. The people on board discovered that the hijackers’ goal was to crash that plane into the nation’s Capitol in Washington D.C. to destroy that building.

When the hijackers took over that flight, they pushed the 40 passengers and crew in the back of the plane. A couple of them got on their cell phones and courageously, bravely began to call loved ones and family. That’s how they got word of what was happening in New York City and in Washington, D.C. and boldly, those 40 passengers and crew decided

they were not going to allow that flight to become a weapon. They ended up crashing that flight, United 93, and perished in a farm field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. But a year and a half later, New York Times, Washington Post, other papers began to publish notes from the persons who perished. They passed around cell phones in those moments before they enacted their plan—reaching out to loved ones. They couldn’t always get persons, so they left messages, in some cases, on answering machines and homes and offices.

Every person deserving of respect and love and kindness; seeing the humanity of every person. Deborah one of the flight attendants, left a message for her husband, Michael. “Honey, there’s been trouble on this flight and I’m afraid I’m not coming home. But I want you to know how much I love you and how grateful I am for your love. Please tell Mom and Dad I love them and give my love to your folks, too. It has been such a joy to be married to you. I always thought we would grow old together. I am so sorry. I won’t be there for that. Bye, honey. I love you.”

Donald was a 52-year-old businessman from Connecticut. He left a message for his wife. “Hey, Cindy, my flight’s been hijacked and we’re understanding what is happening around the country, and we’re going to try stop this thing. And I don’t think I’m going to make it. I know I have not been the best husband and the best father, but thank you for staying with me even through the hard times. And you’re right. I criticize our kids too much. So please tell them I love them and that no dad could ever have had two better kids. And please tell them I’m so proud of them and I’m so sorry I never told them that, but I really, really am. And please know that you have made me a better man and a better person, and you are in my last thoughts right now. I’m sorry I can’t be there to take care of you and I love you.”

Message after message, they said things like that, how much love they felt, how sorry they were, how grateful they were. No one talked about a file on a desk. No one talked about a meeting they were going to miss. They talked about what really mattered and what mattered was love and respect and kindness.

The ability to see everyone with whom we come into contact, every person in our lives, as the *Imago Dei*, as the image of God. To be a nation indivisible means that we fundamentally see every person as

created in the image of God and worthy of love and respect and kindness.

Hamilton closes her book “Indivisible” with these words. She says, “We are a powerful people and we Americans are capable of doing hard things. We sent people to the moon in a tin can, using computers not as sophisticated as the phones we carry in our pockets today. When we work together,” she writes, “we are phenomenal. Being indivisible is no easy feat. It will require dedication and the willingness to stumble, get up, and try again. We need to clarify what it means to be a patriot. She writes that word has come to mean too many things in recent years. Being a patriot isn’t about finding hundreds of ways to fashion the American flag into articles of cloth-

ing or whether you stand or not during the anthem. It’s about how much you care about others and how much you invest in future generations. A patriot, an American patriot, loves their country enough to commit to its growth and not just to extract from its bounty. Patriotism is not about bursts of energy, but of consistent embodiment of values and ideals worthy of this nation.”

Patriotism. It’s not about bursts of energy, but of consistent embodiment of values and ideals worthy of this nation. One nation under God, indivisible, every person, the Imago Dei, worthy of love and respect and kindness. And by the grace of God, we will be indivisible. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.