

3rd Sunday after Pentecost B 09 June 2024

Mark 3:20-35

St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth

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Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He [Jesus] has gone out of his mind.' Let's pray: ...

Have you ever accused someone of being out of their mind? A friend wants to go bungee jumping off a bridge in Africa, and you ask, "Have you gone out of your mind?" On a whim, another friend decides that sky diving sounds like a hoot and they make all of the necessary preparations to jump out of a perfectly good aircraft. You look at them with the best mixture of incredulity and sympathy you can muster and ask, "Have you gone 'round the bend?" Or someone you know is a person of modest income and they decide to buy a house in the current market and you ask, "Are you insane?" There are plenty of situations in which we might ask that question of someone we know, but we're offended when someone asks that question of Jesus. In verse 21, we learn that people were suggesting that Jesus had lost the plot.

This is certainly a shocking statement, but I believe it can help us to understand the ways some people viewed Jesus during his early ministry. Mark's gospel today tells us that people were alarmed by Jesus' behaviour.

Even Jesus' family were startled to the extent that they went out to restrain him, because people thought he was crazy.

We could put a polite spin on the family's actions and suggest that they were merely concerned that Jesus was taking sufficient physical care of himself. Not getting stressed out or overburdened. We could suggest that the family was intervening out of loving concern and support for him. Making sure that he was eating properly and drinking sufficient water and not overdoing it. That's putting a nice construction on things, don't you think? Somehow, I doubt that was their intention.

I think it's more likely that the family really had no understanding of the nature of Jesus' ministry, or who he really was, and they were fearful; maybe even a little embarrassed. In fact, we read in [John 7:5], "For not even his brothers believed in him."

Others believe that Jesus performed many miraculous deeds all of his life. They believed so much in Jesus' divinity that everyone who knew him would be amazed at this perfect human being. I prefer to emphasise the humanity of Jesus and believe that the first miracle he ever performed was at the wedding in Cana. I reckon Jesus grew up as a normal boy and his brothers who were raised with him just thought of him as a brother. They were surprised when he began preaching and when they learned of some of the things he was saying, they wanted him to quit. Maybe they were embarrassed and wanted to whisk him away from the crowds and have him deradicalized. When they finally arrived, there was such a crowd that they couldn't get anywhere near him. They sent Jesus a message, but he left them standing on the outside, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" He makes no acknowledgement that he has a special connection or obligation to them. Jesus hints that there is far more to who he is than meets the eye.

Jesus also alarmed the scribes, but we're much more familiar with their opposition to him. The scribes from Jerusalem had made the considerable journey to Galilee to look into this "Jesus" kerfuffle. They said his power wasn't a good power; that he'd been taken over by Beelzebul, an unclean, satanic, demonic spirit and warned the crowds about him.

This drew from Jesus, his statement about the unforgivable sin. It's a statement that's poorly understood and has unnecessarily disturbed many people.

Lots of people worry that they've committed the unforgivable sin, especially younger people in their teenage years. As a person matures and becomes aware of the consequences of sin, they often feel that things they've done are unforgivable. What they usually mean is that they can't forgive themselves for something they've done and believe it's beyond God's love and redemption. My counsel to them is that I believe God is much more ready to forgive our sins than we are. If you disagree, look at the cross and tell me I'm wrong!

If you read St Mark's account carefully, you'll find that Jesus is saying that the religious leaders can't tell the difference between God's work and Satan's work. They're so caught up in their own importance and so perverted in their intentions that they choose to call light, darkness. By their own folly, pride, and unbelief, the scribes render themselves incapable of receiving forgiveness and so, themselves bear the responsibility for God's judgement of their "eternal sin."

Think about it this way: If someone refuses to believe in God, repeatedly refuses God's guidance, has lost the ability to recognise goodness when they see it; if their moral values are so twisted that they believe that evil is good and good is evil, then, even when confronted by Jesus, they aren't conscious of sin. And if they can't repent, how can they be forgiven?

Rather than wrestling with the idea of an unforgivable sin and whether or not you've committed it, think about it as a state of being. Those who refuse to accept the provision of salvation offered by Christ, those who refuse to throw themselves on the mercy of God, those who refuse to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, are the ones who are caught in a state of unforgiveness. We know that God can forgive sin; indeed, has already forgiven sin by Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, but if you reject God, who can you turn to for forgiveness? Certainly not Satan! To reject God is to reject his forgiveness, then, you're in real strife.

Taking the opportunity presented to him, Jesus spells out the antidote to this conundrum by addressing the issue of family when he asks, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" In answering his own question, Jesus redefines the family, and in the process gives a great definition of faith and the church. He offers a vision of the family of God. Jesus acknowledges that discipleship may cost us our old, natural family ties. But if we do the will of God, we'll discover that we've become members of the new family of God.

Despite Jesus' disappointment that his family and the scribes rejected him, he proclaims the good news that all who do the will of God will be accepted into God's family and his kingdom.

Jesus moves the value of human relationships beyond the physical to the spiritual. As important as physical relationships are, they're not as important as our connection to Jesus (see also Matthew 8:22; Luke 9:60).

As a pastor, this gives me great relief because I'm always cautious about how I approach Mother's Day. I know it's not a happy occasion for everyone. Some people are abused by their mothers or have a challenging relationship with them. For others, sadness comes from wanting to be mothers but for whatever reasons, can't be. Yet, all of us in the family of faith can celebrate because Jesus clearly points out that you don't have to be a physical mother to have the kind of relationships that mothers at their best have. Being a mother isn't so much about biology as it is about relationship.

Who is my mother? Who is my brother? Those who do the will of God. Those who love like Jesus loved. Those who, regardless of their biological relationship, capture the spirit of sacrificial love that God clearly demonstrated in Jesus Christ.

The Good News for all of us is that far from being out of his mind, God loves each one of us with a sacrificial love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

How will you respond to God's great love for you in Christ Jesus? who is perfectly intentional about and mindful of his love for those who are willing to follow him. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.