

***Family Matters?***

**Text:**  
Mark 3:20-35

**A sermon preached by**  
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### Mark 3:20-35

The crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons."

And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 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. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"-- for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you."

And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"

And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."



"Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you," his friends said. And Jesus replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"

I don't know about you but I know my mother and I know I have one brother and one sister. Sometimes they probably don't want to acknowledge that they are related to me ... but that's a story for another time!

Does Jesus really not know who his mother and brothers are? No. Does he not want to admit that those people outside are related to him by birth? No. Does he want to distance himself from who they are or what they've done? I don't think so.

Then why the funny little exchange here?

Jesus is talking about a new family, a family made up of those willing to receive God's message shared in this new way which he has given voice to.

God is determined to have a family, Jesus is saying, but in order to join a new family, one must detach from the old family.

Membership in God's family is a joyful thing, but it also involves some surrender.

When people were going out in the wilderness to see John the Baptist, many were surprised at what he was telling them. The religious leadership who took pride in the power they often used as a bludgeon to keep others in their places were rejected by John. They took great comfort in the existing, old order, they way things "always" had been. The Pharisees and Saducees and priests and scribes boasted of their "memberships" in God's chosen people saying, "My family founded this church" or, "I'm not very religious but I'm really, really spiritual." John the Baptist challenged them, "Don't say to yourselves 'I'm a dues-paying member! Don't say to me I have Abraham and Sarah as my parents!' God can raise up a

family from the stones in this river if God's people won't turn, return, be washed, and get with the revolution!" [Luke 3:8-9]

When you join a club, they give you a pin and a pledge and a secret handshake. But when you join on with Jesus and his followers, you get stripped naked, thrown into the pool, washed, half drowned, and required to revert and be born again. Now that's a different kind of welcome!

In his ministry, Jesus thought nothing of destroying a family business with a simple, "Follow me," which called fishermen to abandon their aging father in the boat and join Jesus as he wandered about with his buddies. He called men and women away from their families of origin and to voluntarily join a new kind of family that was filled with potential hardships and rejection and a different relationship with God and with other people. Jesus' invitation to hit the road broke the hearts of many first-century parents who were counting on the kids for help in their old age. We know Peter was married because of the story of Jesus' healing of his mother-in-law – but who knows what was going on with his wife and children while he was out roaming through the Galilee with Jesus and the band of merry disciples?

Those families who lost someone to the Jesus movement must have been affected. It gives a whole new meaning to the term "left behind." Someone needs to write a series of novels about that left behindness.

Jesus has some strange ideas about family. Here's the Jesus message:

- "I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother." [Matthew 10:35]
- "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, can't be my disciple." [Luke 14:26]

- "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside asking for you," someone said. Jesus replied, "Who? Anyone who does my will is my family." [Luke 3: 35]
- "I'll follow you," a man said to him, "only first let me go give my recently deceased father a decent burial." "Let the dead bury the dead!" replied Jesus. "Follow me and let somebody else do the funeral!" [Matthew 8:22]

That which we have named “family values,” that oft-claimed political phrase that is used to boost one’s own value system or to condemn someone else’s, is just not a part of the Jesus message. "Family values" was not really a Jesus' thing. With Jesus, everything is subordinated to his mission; nothing is more important than obedience to God. Not even family. Isn't it interesting that Jesus appears to devalue that which we consider so valuable?

The gospels tell the story that the chief focus of Jesus' mission was to reconstitute the scattered lost sheep of Israel. Jesus left his biological family in order to form a new family based not on genetic kinship – that is, the way we define family – but rather upon the gracious, barrier-breaking call of God. Jesus got into trouble for practicing a scandalously open-ended table fellowship, eating and meeting and calling the lost and orphaned back home. "This man eats and drinks with SINNERS!" That's one of the earliest and most persistent claims against Jesus.

Our human families, for any of their virtues, are just too small, too closely boxed in. I spend time in pastoral counseling helping people get over the damage done to them in their family. How much money gets spent on therapy trying to work through issues we have with our families? How many holiday meals blow up over issues that rise to the surface when we're all together?

Yet when someone answers Jesus' call to follow, the community of followers – the church, if you will – washes that person in water – baptism – which says, among other things, that the person has been reborn, started over, and has been adopted into a new God-formed family. It is as if the person gets a new name, "Christian," that takes precedence over that person's family name. It is as if the person has already died to old attachments and former relationships and has already been raised to new life. And the church is that fresh, new family that is composed of those who have heard Jesus' "Follow me" and have stepped forward and said "Yes."

Even for the infants that we bring to the bowl. When parents bring a child for baptism, those parents are saying, in effect, "We acknowledge that we are not able to do this on our own. We don't have all the skills we need on your own to raise a faithful follower of Jesus. We need your help." And what we are saying back to those parents is, "We know what you mean because that's our reality too. So we'll adopt your child, we'll take responsibility for this baby, we will help you raise this baby in this new family."

That's powerful. In a world where grandparents are often without grandchildren nearby, and single-parent families, and grandchildren growing up without grandparents, and marriages under stress, we need a bigger family than the one we were born into. You must be born again into a new, far flung family, a family as large as the love of God in Jesus Christ.

It's why I walk through the Sanctuary introducing the newly-baptized as not only one of the newest members of God's family – we are each born a child of God and are always a child of God – but through baptism the absolutely newest member of this family that we call Hope. We are each of us brother and sister, aunt and uncle, grandmother and grandfather to every new baby in this family. And we are each of us brother and sister, aunt and uncle, grandmother and grandfather to each and every one of us who is

connected to this Jesus community.

What the community of followers asks people to do to be a follower of Jesus is to be baptized, to be adopted by a new, barrier-breaking family, the church. You must be disposed to let go of your American-ness and the foolish individualism it preaches and be subsumed into a family bigger and more demanding than the one into which you were born. You must come to the table, with some of the most sinful, often difficult-to-bear folk and to meet them as "brother" or "sister," just because Jesus loves them.

That's the table before us today. We come. Baptized or not – an open table of grace is set for us. And every time the family of God gathers for Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper – or gathers for a covered-dish supper or serves up soup to the homeless on the street corner, or, for that matter, gathers for a bowl of strawberries and ice cream under a blue-sky canopy like yesterday – the world looks at this odd family and says, "Jesus is hanging out with the same reprobates that got him crucified."

And we are able to say, "Thank God for *this* family."

Amen.