

## **SERMON 7 JUNE 2015**

**Reading:** Mark 3:20-35

### **WHAT IS THE CONTEXT OF OUR READING?**

I do not know about you, but when I read our reading in the week, I was quite shocked by the reaction of Jesus' family. I mean, in antiquity, it was all about kinship and family. Families stood together and would never shame a family member in public.

What is going on in our text?

Mark - being the oldest Gospel and John gives a totally different portrayal of Jesus' family than Matthew and Luke. Neither Mark nor John has genealogies for Jesus. Mark never mentions the name of Joseph as Jesus' father and only refers to Jesus as the "son of Mary". The relationship of Jesus to presumed brothers and sisters is also unclear according to Mark 6:3. According to Mark, Jesus had 4 brothers, namely James, Joseph, Judas and Simon.

It is only in Mark that we find the family so hostile against Jesus. But is it so simple?

No - we need to reconstruct the events in Mark. Mark tells us in the previous chapter that Jesus started his earthly ministry, calling his disciples and giving them authority to drive out demons and preach in His name.

Then Jesus and his newly appointed disciples arrived at a house. All of a sudden there was a large crowd. His family in the meantime heard about this. I mean, after all, it was a wee Galilean village – news travel fast, just like it does here in Kirknewton and East Calder! Jesus' family tried to deter Jesus because obviously they might have heard some rumours.

And then almost at the same time, the teachers of the Law entered

and accused Jesus of demon possession. This was a very serious allegation in antiquity! If this allegation was found to be true, you could have been stoned to death. But then Jesus countered their allegation by turning their “practise of labelling” on its head.

And after this, his mother and brothers eventually arrived and, because the place was so full of other people, they sent word to Jesus that they have arrived.

Jesus then responded by focussing on His role as the Saviour to the world by emphasising that His brother, sister and mother are all those who do the will of God!

He does not denounce His earthly kin, but includes others into the family of God.

In Mark’s Gospel it is clear from the beginning that the disciples had no idea who Jesus really was. It is also clear that His family had no idea. I am certain that their reactions to Jesus’ public ministry were quite normal given their background and circumstances as peasants living in the Mediterranean context. I am not convinced that their behaviour was really being “hostile” to Jesus. I think they tried to rescue Jesus, as families in those days did. They wanted to have a counter argument against the claims of the teachers of the Law that Jesus was demon possessed namely to say that He was mentally incompetent.

What is the message? Jesus included all believers into the close circle of His family through his salvation, resurrection and ascension to heaven.

## **LET US APPLY THE MEANING OF OUR READING**

There is nothing as queer as family! I am sure no one will disagree with me for saying this. But actually I also would like to add that there is nothing like the bond that ties family members together.

And we all have family members that we frown upon. We all have family members that we really do not want to be associated with. I mean we all have an auntie or uncle, nephew or niece, or cousin who tells us that we are too fat or too loud or not too clean. We all have these family members that shame us in public by telling things about us nobody else should know. But in the end of the day when the winds of trouble blow, it is often the same family that rescues us and accepts us as we are.

Family is important but to be part of God's family is much more important, something that Jesus emphasizes in our reading. Everyone that adheres to God and His will is part of His family. Jesus is showing His followers in a big way the dynamics of how the family of God works.

In our reading there are three possibilities/criteria of belonging to the family of God through Jesus Christ. And then in the end Jesus shows the only way.

To be part of God's family requires no blood relationship. To be part of God's family requires no status or human honour. The only way to be included is to do the will of God.

And how do we do the will of God?

Well, Jesus' followers were the living proof. They left all their belongings, their jobs, their families behind and followed Jesus. They sacrificed and believed in His words of the coming salvation. Yes, those who were sitting around Him were the true examples of doing God's will and not his family members or the teachers of the Law who did not believe in Him.

So when ever and where ever we follow Jesus in Word and deed, when we sacrifice for our faith in and through Jesus Christ, we become his mother, brothers and sisters in faith. Whenever we love in the same way as Jesus taught us – we are doing the will of God.

Whenever we help the most vulnerable in our society, we are doing what God intended us to do. When we help others – even at the expense of ourselves FULL STOP!

I read of a congregation in South Africa who tried to do just that. As you all know South Africa is in a pretty bad shape, especially the roads. In this one village called Ermelo there were a lot of potholes in the roads causing all sorts of problems. So the local Minister came up with the most amazing idea: why don't we, as Christians, fix these potholes for the sake and safety of the community. So last Saturday he gathered able men, got someone to teach them the "know-how" and then they started the work of fixing 50-plus potholes and three ditches!

To that community it signalled something quite significant of God's love in action.

We have the same opportunity this Saturday and every week living in our villages by the way we talk, by the way we either exclude or include other people in the fellowship. We have ONE day next Saturday to show the LOVE of God when we serve our community here in East Calder. Let us do it with smiles on our faces and not grins of judgement. Let us do it not because we have to, but because we want to. Let us talk to others in a respectful way not only because we know them, but because God called us to it.

Jesus was very clever. He wanted to make the point clear that although He was fully human, He was fully God as well. He did not **only** belong to a certain specific family or clan. Everyone that is doing the will of God His father is His family.

You and I are his family – we are brothers and sisters through faith alone.

Amen