

Sermon June 9, 2024

Jesus Says

Mark 3:20-35 (*The Message*)

Jesus came home and, as usual, a crowd gathered—so many making demands on him that there wasn't even time to eat. His friends heard what was going on and went to rescue him, by force if necessary. They suspected he was believing his own press.

The religion scholars from Jerusalem came down spreading rumors that he was working black magic, using devil tricks to impress them with spiritual power. Jesus confronted their slander with a story: "Does it make sense to send a devil to catch a devil, to use Satan to get rid of Satan? A constantly squabbling family disintegrates. If Satan were fighting Satan, there soon wouldn't be any Satan left. Do you think it's possible in broad daylight to enter the house of an awake, able-bodied man, and walk off with his possessions unless you tie him up first? Tie him up, though, and you can clean him out.

"Listen to this carefully. I'm warning you. There's nothing done or said that can't be forgiven. But if you persist in your slanders against God's Holy Spirit, you are repudiating the very One who forgives, sawing off the branch on which you're sitting, severing by your own perversity all connection with the One who forgives." He gave this warning because they were accusing him of being in league with Evil.

Just then his mother and brothers showed up. Standing outside, they relayed a message that they wanted a word with him. He was surrounded by the crowd when he was given the message, "Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside looking for you."

Jesus responded, "Who do you think are my mother and brothers?" Looking around, taking in everyone seated around him, he said, "Right here, right in front of you—my mother and my brothers. Obedience is thicker than blood. The person who obeys God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

God's Home

In another life, I taught sociology at FCC. Each semester, when we reached to chapter about families, I did an activity with the students. I asked them to write their own definition of "family" (without looking at their book) and then break into groups of 4-5 people and write a group definition. For some, the process was easy, the words fell into place and everyone agreed. Other groups really struggled. One group argued so long about whether pets were included, that they never completed their definition. In another, every member was so wounded by their families of origin, that they completely denied kinship ties in their definition. Families, according to them, were the people you choose to be with.

But of course, it's much more complicated than that. For better or worse, families can't just be discarded like yesterday's trash. We are connected, no matter what we do. Even if you don't see them for 40 years, they are still your family, and we carry the lessons learned every step of the way.

Family is key to Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus, God's own son... raised by Joseph... nurtured by Mary. He carried the lessons learned with every step he took along life's journey... even as he faced the cross.

So, today you might be a little surprised by his family's reaction to his ministry. We expect the Pharisees and Saducees to give him a hard time... but Mary? And his own siblings?

Into the crowd of grumblers and skeptics walks Jesus' family. I can almost hear them: "Jesus, you are embarrassing us!" and then that moment of fear that creeps in..."maybe he really is as crazy as people say..."

Maybe they were truly concerned about his mental health... maybe they were more worried about how Jesus' behavior would directly affect them... maybe they were just concerned for his personal safety. People who talk and act like Jesus come to no good ends. But regardless of their motivations, we know one thing: Jesus' mother and brothers came that day to stop him. To

bring him home. To stop him from building up God's Kingdom. Jesus learned a lesson that all of us learn eventually:

Families are complicated.

So, here we are, in what is essentially a family church: Many of your families have been here, in this place, for generations. We cry at one another's funerals and celebrate the birth of each new baby! Family ties intersect, both seen and unseen. There are family ties that I still haven't uncovered – ties that are fundamental to who you are and how you see yourselves.

Which brings us back to Jesus, as his own family deny and reject who he is: Not only are they rejecting his ministry... his healings... his beliefs.

They are rejecting the Son of God.

So, like my students, Jesus expands the definition of what family means. Here is one of the definitions my students came up with: "a family is a group connected by birth, adoption, marriage or choice who support and care for each other and offer unconditional love." Sounds pretty nice, doesn't it. Support and care... and unconditional love. Sounds like what we all want.

Or, as Jesus said as he looked at the crowd of people who loved him, "these are my mother and siblings." All who follow Jesus are members of his extended family... all who follow Jesus are truly members of God's beautiful family.

Look around... we are all members of God's beautiful, complicated family.

And as members of God's extended family, we bear responsibility for one another. We are called to offer support, caring and unconditional support to all of the various members, far and wide. It is not up to us to decide who belongs and who doesn't. We don't get to pick and choose who we want to be related to, any more than you can choose the family you are born to. Our only expectation is to support, care for and love each other, no matter who they are. Why? because we are all a part of God's extended family. Or as

we in the UCC says: "Whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

The goal of extravagant welcome is what we should always strive for.

And that can be uncomfortable... even frightening. We live in a time when people spend a lot of time worrying about who is in and who is out. Families, churches, communities are torn apart by the polarization that divides us. It's tempting to surround ourselves with people who look like us, think like us, agree with us. It's tempting... but it's not what God requires of us. Jesus calls us to look beyond our family pews and to embrace a new way of living. It's not enough to do things the way we always have, it is not enough to hang out with the people we know and are comfortable with. Jesus reminds us that our family extends far and wide and encompasses people who look different from us, act different from us... Those who view the world differently from us...

We are called to embrace those who are different than we are.

Today, Jesus reminds us that we are always connected by our faith and those family ties are stronger than any ties that came before. Who is our family? All who claim Jesus as their own. All whom Jesus himself claims as family.

When we reject anyone who Jesus claims as mother, brother or sister, we are rejecting Jesus himself.

But when we accept Jesus' mother, brothers and sisters, we are doing our part to spread Jesus' ministry. When we act as family – when we act in a way that is supportive and caring... when we reach out to each other in love...we are doing our part to build God's beloved Kingdom. A house divided will fall, Jesus reminds us. But a house united by mutual support and love will always get stronger and stronger.

Jesus will not allow his opponents or his family to interrupt the proclamation of God's kingdom. And when that kingdom is preached, it will create disruptions and hope. If you want a comfortable gospel that affirms the

status quo, you're probably at the wrong place because the gospel always turns things upside down, inviting us to see that God has more in store for us than we'd imagined, more even than we'd dare hope.

New life changes the lives we've gotten used to. Sometimes it is uncomfortable or frightening, but, new life is the promise of the gospel. When it is proclaimed those who are most satisfied in their old lives probably aren't sure why they came, while those who are down and out and eager for a chance to change embrace the source of this message. Following Jesus means taking letting go of the things that hold us back, and it is also life-changing for anyone willing to risk believing the message of this preacher who comes to us – the Son of God.. and our own brother.

"Whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

We Welcome New Members

Welcome and Introduction of New Members

Dear friends, today we rejoice in your journey of faith that has brought you to this time and place. We give thanks for every community of faith that has been your spiritual home in the past, and the spiritual mentors who have guided you on your way. We celebrate your presence today in this household of faith, where we are seekers and servants, growing in God's transforming love.

Our Covenant Together

Do you seek to grow in God's transforming love, as you follow in the Way of Jesus? **(I do)**

Are you open to the movement of the Spirit in your life? **(I am)**

Will you join with us as a church, as we seek follow God's direction in our midst? Will you welcome and respect each person's freedom to interpret God's Truth, as God gives them each light and wisdom. **(I will with the help of God)**

Elwin: Will you participate in the life and mission of this diverse and inclusive community of God's people, praying and working with us in ministry together? Will you share regularly with us in the worship of God and financial support of our ministries? Will you offer your talents to our work, as the Spirit leads us to serve the community and the world? **(I will with the help of God)**

Affirmation of the Congregation:

All: We give thanks for the faith God has worked within you. We welcome you wherever you are on your faith journey with our love, acceptance, and respect. We pledge to work together as a community of faith to provide opportunities for worship, study, fellowship, celebration, and service. We promise to give spiritual and emotional care and support in times of need; and to be faithful as fellow stewards of God's grace. Together we will work for peace and social, economic and ecological justice and strive to bring about the world that we believe God intends.

A Litany of What We Believe

One: Our vision for our church is:

All: Our church will grow into a vibrant and diverse community of Christians that welcomes and seeks out people from all walks of life. That supports the spiritual, physical and emotional needs that challenge the community and its members.

One: The mission God sends us out to do is:

All: We exist to LOVE people where they are and encourage them to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

One: As followers of Christ, we share these Core Values:

We Love God

All: "You shall love the Lord God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39 NRSV)

One: We Show Compassionate Love of Everyone

All: "Love one another, as Jesus calls us to love everyone, saying, ' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.'" (John 13:34)

One: Wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome with open arms and open hearts!

All: Amen

Welcome to the Community

Invitation to Give

As people of God, we are called by the Spirit to continue the work of Jesus and the disciples who sought to build up beloved community. We are each equipped by the Spirit with unique gifts, abilities, and experiences and interests to continue that work.

Prayer Shawls

"May this shawl made with love, through prayer, be a mantle and sign of God's healing presence. May it strengthen you when you are weary. May it surround you and ease your suffering. May it encircle you when you feel in pain. May it comfort you when you feel alone. May it remind you of God's abiding love. Amen."

What is it that you have been gifted with and are open to offering this day to bring about God's beloved community on Earth?

