

Proper 5 Year B

6/6/2021

1 Samuel 8:4-20; 11:14-15; Psalm 138; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35

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Over the last few months, we have celebrated the cross of Jesus Christ on Good Friday...

The resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday...

The ascension of our Lord on Ascension Thursday...

The empowering of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost...

The mystery of God on Trinity Sunday...

And I wish I could say from here...

That after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ...

After the continual presence of the Holy Spirit with the church...

That the church lived happily ever after.

I wish it were that easy...

But alas Jesus himself said:

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also (John 15:20)

The church over the centuries has had times of great triumph in the things of God...

She has also had great tragedies...

Even while proclaiming her actions were of God.

But regardless of all the ups and downs the church has had over the years...

She is still the Church...

The people of God...

She is still the bride of Christ.

In our conversion toward God...

Christ becoming our Savior and Lord...

We enter into a new family...

As we heard last week in our reading from Romans 8...

St. Paul said:

When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...

To be *in Christ*... to abide with Christ...

Is to join a new family...

A new people group...

The people of God.

And with that we inherit all the triumphs and tragedies that are a part of our family history...

But even more we look toward the glorious future...
the destiny of our Christian family.

Today we have a baptism...

(And we will all say together our baptismal covenant...)

In our baptism we announce, and we proclaim that we turn to Jesus
Christ and accept him as our Savior.

We state that we put our whole trust in his grace and love.

We promise to follow and obey Jesus as our Lord.

This confession has been made for centuries by millions of people
following that first Pentecost in the first century of our Lord.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus foreshadows in his own life the need
for this new family... this heavenly family...
and how you join this family of God.

Early in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was healing and casting out demons.
He was preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God.

And when his family heard about what was going on...

And how the crowds began to grow...

The text says that the crowd grew so large that Jesus and his disciples could not even eat...

They became worried about him.

They went to restrain him... saying: *He has gone out of his mind.*

Jewish teachers came down from Jerusalem...

They thought Jesus had a problem too.

Suggesting that Beelzebul... Satan had come into him.

Often when we do mighty acts of faith for God, we hear the rumblings too.

We hear:

You can't do that... nobody will attend.

You need to get your life in order first before you go and start a ministry.

You need to make sure that God is leading you and not something else.

Sometimes these things are good advice.

Sometimes they are just excuses from family members and friends.

Well, Jesus is having none of it.

He calls the idea that he is filled with Satan as rubbish.

Satan can't cast out Satan.

He warns the people about blaspheme against the Holy Spirit.

Cautioning them that this sin can never have forgiveness.

Many curiosities have been awoken by this warning...

Often called the unpardonable sin.

But more or less it is to deny the ministry of the Holy Spirit in one's life.

It is to be blind to the truth.

The Holy Spirit seals us as his own forever.

To deny the saving work of the Spirit in your life is to reject God.

As Bishop N. T. Wright put it:

*It's rather that if you decide firmly that the doctor who is offering to perform a life-saving operation on you is in fact a sadistic murderer, you will never give your consent to the operation.*¹

In other words, this unpardonable sin is to deny or reject the salvation of God...

He does not force his salvation on us.

He woos us and he calls us...

But he does not force himself upon us.

¹ NT Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (Louisville: WJK, 2001, 2004), 38.

And then we find ourselves at the end of our reading.

A rather uncomfortable bit about Jesus' mother and brothers.

They were standing outside the house.

They were concerned about him.

They sent someone into the crowd to get him.

And they told Jesus that his mother and brothers were outside.

And what was Jesus' response to his family?

He said:

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.

Let's be certain that Jesus was not downplaying the importance of family.

There is plenty of scripture to support families in God's creative purposes...

There is plenty of teaching on families in scripture.

But, as Scholar Donald English writes:

*...it is a warning that even so deep, precious, and basic a relationship as that of human family [it] is superseded by the fellowship of the new family of God, which will continue into eternity.*²

You see, Jesus is creating a new family...

The family of God.

One that supersedes even the birth families of our world.

And families were even a bigger deal in Jesus' day than they are in our day.

The family bond was tight and long lasting.

Children did not move far from their parents...

And for the first century Jew the family bond was the fabric of living for God... loyalty to Israel as the people of God.

Jesus was being shocking with the norms of his culture.

God is doing the unthinkable: he is starting a new family, a new holy people, and is doing so without regard for ordinary human family bonds.³

² Donald English, *The Message of Mark*, TBST (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 90-91.

³ NT Wright, *Ibid*, 40.

What Jesus is saying can be painful...

it really can be quite shocking.

We easily slide into group identities...

We find places of belonging...

Even beyond our immediate families...

In memberships, tribes, clubs, political parties, social classes... whatever it may be.

But the greatest identity...

The greatest bond...

The greatest family we have is the family of God.

For some of us this is rather uncomfortable language.

But for others this is life-giving.

There are so many Christians around the world that proclaim the same faith in Christ at their baptism... as we do...

Jesus Christ is our Lord and our Savior.

Yet unlike most of us here...

they are rejected and suffer because of their faith.

From countries like Nigeria (one of the largest Anglican countries in the world) persecution comes to many Christians.

When a Muslim converts to Christianity, they are shunned by their family...

If they live in a Muslim country, they face economic hardships and possibly prison, torture or death.

Some of the oppression is government sanctioned and some government permitted; most is government ignored.

So where do they turn?

Who is their family?

The people of God.

The ones who do the will of God are their brother, sister, and mother.

Even in the USA there are many who experience the beauty of this family of God.

Many Christians who are single find joy in the news that they have been adopted into this new family of God.

Especially during holidays... like the cultural Christmas season.

As so much emphasis is given in society to the importance of family...

So many Hallmark movies are about people going home for the holidays.

It becomes a time of depression and anxiety for many.

Even in the church... family can become the purpose of a holiday like Christmas.

I know a few years ago when Christmas day fell on a Sunday morning...

Many churches decided to not have Sunday worship...

Saying that on this holy day of the church you should spend time with your family.

As a pastor I spend time with parishioners in nursing homes...

Some who have no local family...

Some who have no family at all...

The only family they have is the family of God.

The phone calls, letters, and visits they get from parishioners.

So, as we consider the words of our Lord in this text.

Some of us find these words troubling...

Perhaps scandalous.

But some find them comforting...

Perhaps hopeful.

The words of our Lord are not meant to minimize the importance of family....

The weight of the full canon of scripture would declare the importance of family.

But when we become a member of the family of God...

When we become born of the Spirit...

Born into the family of God...

It supersedes all earthly identities.

Who is our family?

Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.

May we build each other up.

May we encourage each other.

May we be *there* for each other.

Because we need each other.

We are family.

Amen.