

Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 9, 2024

Mark 3:20–35

### *Doing the Work of God*

In today's Gospel reading, Mark uses a literary technique called "intercalating" or "sandwiching", in which one incident (the dispute on blasphemy) is sandwiched within another (opposition from family and the designation of the true family of Jesus).

To understand today's Gospel reading we need to look back to the beginning of Mark to realize how Jesus' family came to believe that Jesus just might be insane. And, further, that the Jerusalem scribes and Pharisees sought to undercut his authority by saying that he works by the power of Beelzebul and that he has an unclean spirit.

Go with me on a journey with Jesus as he began his ministry with a flying start.

In Mark chapter 1, John the Baptist proclaims a baptism of repentance to many people and announces that one more powerful than he is coming who will baptize people with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus travelled from Nazareth to Galilee and was baptized by John and immediately the Holy Spirit descended and a voice said, "you are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased". Then immediately the spirit sent Jesus to the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan for 40 days.

Later, after John's arrest, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news". Jesus then moved along the sea of Galilee and called those who would drop everything and follow him..

Immediately after Jesus called the first disciples they travelled to Capernaum and while in the synagogue, Jesus healed a man with an unclean spirit. Then they went to the house of Simon and Andrew where Jesus healed many who were sick or possessed with demons.

Jesus then went on a preaching tour of Galilee. He cleansed a leper, healed a paralytic, and asked a tax collector to follow him. He won an argument with the Pharisees about fasting. Jesus proved that there was nothing wrong with gathering grain on the Sabbath.

Continuing, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Later when he was at the seaside, crowds pressed around him and unclean spirits, "fell down before him, and cried, 'you are the Son of God!'" "

So far in our journey it seems clear that to the crowds and unclean spirits, Jesus is surely working by God's power.

HOWEVER:

The scribes do not completely believe this evidence that Jesus is acting by God's influence. Hear, first what the crowds are saying about Jesus' teaching and ministry (NRSV)

"he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes"

“his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee

“the whole city was gathered around the door”

“everyone is searching for you”

“people came to him from every quarter”

“we have never seen anything like this”

“all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him”

Now we read what the Pharisees say about Jesus’ teaching and ministry (NRSV)

“Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

“Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

“Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?”

They were silent when Jesus asked, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?”

At this time the Pharisees went out and conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Agani, in today’s Gospel reading we see that Jesus must face not only criticism from the Pharisees, but serious questioning from his own family!

Listen, again to Mark 3: 20 – 21.

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 getting carried away with himself. Jesus’ family and friends began to believe that he was insane

Later the Jewish leaders say, “He’s crazy, a maniac- out of his head completely. Why bother listening to him?” But others weren’t so sure: “These aren’t the words of a crazy man. Can a ‘maniac’ open blind eyes?” (John 10: 20-21) And in Mark 3:6 after Jesus healed a man’s withered hand, “The Pharisees got out as fast as they could, sputtering about how they would join forces with Herod’s followers and ruin him.” This is the first attempt of the Pharisees to destroy Jesus

At this point in today’s Gospel reading, we see that Jesus has had ENOUGH of this talk by both the pharisees and his family!

Jesus confronts their slander with a story. In a series of parable like statements Jesus gives an answer to those who accuse him of doing all his healings by the power of Satan which he likens to a blasphemy against God.

To cast out demons in Satan’s name is ridiculous. Jesus explains that if he is Satan and casts out demons (Satan), that would mean that he destroyed himself! The truth, says Jesus, is that he has

entered Satan's house and is overcoming the power of evil. He goes on to say that to steal a person's property someone must first overcome that person and then he could steal his property. Jesus then uses the cleansing of a man with an unclean spirit, as he did in

Capernaum, saying that he could do that only by first overpowering Satan, the ruler of demons. To accuse Jesus of being Satan is blasphemy, a sin against God.

Jesus continues in his rebuke of the Pharisees by making a very important judgment when he says that we can be forgiven for sins against others, however, a sin against God is blasphemous and a violation of the commandment – Exodus 20:7 (NRSV) “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name”. Or in Leviticus 24:15 (NRSV), “Anyone who curses God shall bear the sin.” There are several other references to the result of blasphemy against God which can be found in Matthew and Luke.

The statements from the Pharisees that Jesus' work is evil is on very dangerous ground. The Pharisees were Biblical scholars and should have known better, for they were responsible for helping people understand the laws of God. The scribes have shown that they no longer recognize or value what is good.

In my research for today's message, I have found so, so many references to the consequences of blasphemy against God that we could be for several hours. I will spare you that, but be assured that such an action against God is serious business.

We see, *now* that the inclusion of Jesus' mother, brothers and sisters into this scene becomes a major focus of today's Gospel reading when Jesus is told that they have shown up and are very concerned that he has become “carried away with himself,” that he just might be crazy!

When Jesus says, “Who do you think are my mother and brothers?” it has always seemed disrespectful to me, almost haughty! I have come to understand that It is when he asks this question that he is setting the stage for explaining just what “family” means. That “family” includes everyone who does the will of God.

The word, “everyone,” or in some Bible versions, “whoever” has encouraged many and brought comfort to many and makes no difference what the color of skin is, or socio-economic status, or nationality or gender. Jesus does *not exclude* drunks or prisoners or other ne'er do-well's

All who do the will of God are automatically enrolled in Jesus' family circle.

So, who are Jesus' mother, brothers, and sisters?

If we are doing God's will and are not blaspheming God, we are Jesus family.

May it be so!

W.S. Bray