

Sermon

3 Pentecost/Proper 5B June 9, 2024

Mark 3:20-35

Families are weird. They begin almost always – not always, but mostly always – when two people fall in love and have children. And then things get weird. There are good kids and bad kids. There always seems to be one proverbial black sheep in the family. Maybe there's a divorce and remarriage. Various alliances and battles pop up. Everything from loving support to bitter jealousy is dealt with, some of it permanent and some of it shifting with the seasons.

Families are weird.

This might be why today's gospel strikes a nerve with people. Or maybe it's why Mark included it in his story. If Jesus was fully human and fully divine, then that fully human side was not immune to having a weird family.

After his encounter with the Pharisees last week, Jesus begins gathering a large following, so much so that he had to teach from a boat in one story. Demons readily acknowledge him, and he chose twelve men to be apostles who would also proclaim the good news and cast out demons.

And today he goes home.

The gospel says that the crowd that gathered was so large they (Jesus and the apostles, we assume) could not even eat. It's unclear as to what this exactly means, but one interpretation is that Jesus and the apostles are so busy dealing with the crowds that it's impossible to find time to eat. They were so busy that they worked through their lunch hour.

His family hears about what's going on and they go out to restrain him. That word restrain has a tone of violence to it. People told his family that he's gone out of his mind, so think about the physical restraints that were used to control people deemed mentally insane. It's a way to take control. Jesus who has been wandering around the countryside proclaiming a radical message of God's love and inclusion and getting into trouble with the authorities, is now in need of being restrained and controlled by his family. It's almost like they want to say, "Okay, you've had your fun, your little adventure, it's now time to get a real job."

When his family finally arrives, they gather outside.

I want to say a little about being outside. In a few places, Mark uses outside to symbolically define a closeness to Jesus. His popularity results in a large following. Those who don't follow are outside that circle. Jesus calls twelve men to be apostles, so some disciples are outside that group. Peter, James, and John form the inner circle, with the others being outside. Eventually Jesus is alone at his passion and death.

When his family arrives, his mother and brothers are standing outside. Mark is laying the groundwork for a new community, a new family, that Jesus is working to create. Jesus is working to replace biologically-bound families with a family and community based in faith and obedience to God. Whoever does the will of God – loving neighbors, doing justice, walking humbly with God – become the brothers, sisters, and mothers of Jesus.

Families are weird.

As Jesus' family came to restrain him because they had been told he had lost his mind, I think about how many families have tried to restrain their members in any number of ways. Whether that involves attempts at financial control or mental control, it happens.

How many stories have we heard, or maybe know, about people being disowned for marrying the wrong person? Certain families can't abide the idea of interracial unions. Children who have come out as lgbtq have found themselves alone and living on the streets. Parents abuse children physically and mentally. Children abuse and take advantage of elderly parents. And the list goes on. Families are weird.

Knowing that families are weird, Jesus is looking to establish a new family, a new community, based in God's love. Those who do the will of God, he says, are his family.

But you know what? We can be just as weird. Abuse can happen in churches. Power struggles and fights happen in churches. Clergy can be both

victims and perpetrators. Newcomers and visitors are threatened if they sit in the wrong pew. And the list goes on. Church families are weird.

Families are weird because people are weird. That applies to both biological and adoptive families, such as churches.

We are born into biological families and their weirdness. And, for the most part, there's nothing we can do about that. But we have chosen to be part of this family. You have chosen to be here because of liturgy, theology, weekly Communion, outreach, or any number of other things. I have chosen to be here because I value small-town ministry and the belief that we can do good things in Buffalo.

Those choices, however, must be rooted in the hard work of Christian discipleship. This family should be a haven for those whose biological families have rejected them. This family should be a place of healing for those who have been harmed by other Christian communities. This family should be a place of mystery for those tired of easy, shallow, black-and-white answers. This family should welcome outsiders, outcasts, and newbies to do the hard work of discipleship alongside us as equals.

Families are weird. It is our job to be a less weird, or a differently weird, family as we work at living into the will of God.

Amen.