

2021-06-06 – Rev Esma Collins-Marks

Mark 3: 20-35

We often talk about the Church being a Family - which sounds all sweet and fluffy, until we read a passage like today's Gospel.

Have you ever done something that made other people wonder if you have lost your mind? If so, you can probably understand what is going on in Mark. This takes place early in Jesus' ministry when word of his teachings and miracles is starting to spread. Jesus' earthly family and friends didn't understand his ministry. They didn't understand that he was the Son of God. To the people of Nazareth, he was just the son of Mary and Joseph – his earthly parents.

We are the same. Sometimes we can't understand Jesus and his ministry. Sometimes it's hard for us to understand who Jesus is, what he does and why he does what he does. Often we make a rash judgment about Jesus. We need to ask God what his will is for our lives. We need to ask God why he is doing what he is doing, in our lives.

Because the Pharisees did not understand what Jesus was doing, they accused him of being possessed by the devil. They wanted to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people, but their claim had one big flaw. How could the devil defeat the devil? The devil and his angels are of equal strength, so evil can't defeat evil. A strong man can only be defeated by someone who is stronger. Since good is always stronger than evil, good will always defeat evil. Jesus is the champion of everything that is good, so he will always defeat evil.

Given a choice between those who share his genes and those who share his faith, Jesus says "Here [point to congregation] are my mother, my sisters, my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my mother my sister and my brother."

Here is a new family, based not on mistreatment or abuse, but on God's love, the love and acceptance he shows to us, and the love and acceptance that (however inadequately) we seek in turn to share with

each other. Families are meant to be there for each other - and if that is true of human families, how much more so is that meant to be true of the Family of Jesus. Of course we are fallen fallible failures who don't live up to the ideals - but we are also children of God, trying to put them into practise. The church can be a family for those who have no family - be they the bereaved or the lonely or the abandoned or the abused. The church is a family for those who have no family. We probably all know people for whom the church is a wonderful support, from the little things like people who would have nowhere to go for Christmas dinner if fellow church members had not invited them, to even deeper, more time consuming and more costly support through difficult times. We love to hear such stories because they are encouraging, they are good news, they make us feel good, and they are true. The church can be a family for those who have no family. "Hurray" we all say - "Isn't it lovely that the church is a family".

But that is not the context in which Jesus speaks in our Gospel. Here Jesus is having a row with his blood relatives. They think he is taking this faith thing of his too far, he needs to think about the needs of his family and reign things in a bit.

And Jesus lets them know in no uncertain terms who his true family is. It is not those who share his blood - it is those who share his faith. I agree: this is uncomfortable for us. A question: do we go to a relative's birthday brunch or go to church? From this passage, what would Jesus's answer be? Not the one we would like it to be! You and I will have things that to us are self evidently true: of course we would do certain things for a relative. Jesus challenges our certainties. I am not sure if I am very comfortable with it. But it is there in Jesus's words. Where do our first priorities lie? Who are our true family? "Here [point to congregation] are my mother, my sisters, my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my mother, my sister, and my brother."

Of course for some - their family will all share their faith. In the end Jesus's mother stood at the cross and prayed with the disciples from Easter to Pentecost. In the end Jesus's brother James became so committed to Christianity that he ended up the first bishop of Jerusalem.

For some of us, all our family will share our faith. But many of us will identify more with Jesus at this point in his ministry than post Easter: our families contain members who just don't get our faith.

You may have children who you brought dutifully to church and Sunday School every week - and now as adults it just doesn't mean anything to them. They respect us for our faith. Perhaps they come with us when they are down for Christmas and Easter - but this thing that is so important to us, they just don't get. It hurts when someone we love who is part of our family just does not get this faith that is so important to us. We can feel Jesus's pain when his relatives just don't get his faith.

C.S.Lewis famously said "God has no grandchildren". We can do everything in our power to share our faith with our children and with our other relatives, but in the end, it is their decision.

The good news from this bible passage is that Jesus's family don't stay where they are at - in the end they come to embrace Jesus's faith. And they do that not because Jesus waters things down or panders to them, but because he uncompromisingly shows the importance of the values he holds. Because Jesus shows how important these values are for him, his relatives eventually come to see how important these values are.

If we want our blood family to share our faith, the best thing we can do is make our faith family a true and radical family and community that they would want to be a part of. Amen.