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Mark 3:20-35
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Who Is My Mother?

In light of day being Mother's Day, I'll tell you the story of three sons who had left home, went out on their own, and prospered. Getting back together, they discussed the gifts they were able to give their elderly mother for Mother's Day.

The first said, "I built a big house for Mom."

The second said, "I sent her a Mercedes with a driver."

The third smiled and said, "I've got you, both beat. You know how Mom enjoys the Bible, but can't see very well. I sent her a brown parrot that can recite the entire Bible. It took 20 monks in a monastery 12 years to teach him. I had to pledge to contribute \$100,000.00 a year for 10 years, but it was worth it. Mom just has to name the chapter and verse, and the parrot will recite it."

Soon time later, Mom sent out her thank you letters: "Milton," she wrote the first son, "The house you built is so huge. I live in only one room, but I have to clean the whole house."

"Marvin," she wrote to another, "I am too old to travel. I stay home all the time, so I never use the Mercedes. And the driver is so rude!"

"Dearest Melvin," she wrote to her third son, "You were the only son to have the good sense to know what your mother likes. That chicken you sent was delicious."

I guess that is one way to get the Word of God in us!

Happy Mothers Day to all our Moms out there. Today is your day. I want to begin by expressing on behalf of everyone how much we love you and appreciate all that you do.

I loved Michelle's cartoon in the May newsletter. It shows two children wishing to give their mother the day off for Mothers Day and how they had hired some help to cover all her bases. A chef, a taxi driver, a nurse, a priest, a cleaning lady, a fortune teller, a construction worker, and finally and most importantly, a clown. The last one was what I found most humorous. Our mothers have a way to make even the worst day better!

I wanted you to hear this upfront because today's message could possibly seem like I am "dis-ing" on Jesus' mother. I am not. Let us just say that today's question, however, may take a less than normal approach for a Mothers Day sermon.

The bible is unmistakably clear that we should honor our parents since the fourth of the ten commandments states. “Honor your father and mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”¹ So honoring one’s parents is up there along with not murdering, committing adultery, stealing, lying, or wanting what belongs to someone else. Pretty important rules for living.

As I said, today’s question might seem a little problematic on a day like today. Especially when taken out of context, it could seem like Jesus was being dishonorable to his mother. As it goes, crowds had begun following Jesus everywhere “for he had healed so many that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. Whenever evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out ‘You are the Son of God.’ But Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell who he was.”²

Please join me as we read from Mark 3:20-35.

20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. **21** When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

23 So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan? **24** If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. **25** If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. **26** And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. **27** In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house. **28** Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, **29** but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”

30 He said this because they were saying, “He has an impure spirit.”

31 Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. **32** A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”

33 “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked.

34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! **35** Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

¹ Deuteronomy 5:16

² Mark 3:10-12

Fear and trembling is how I begin this morning as we wrestle with this question, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” But let see if I can talk myself off this ledge. Before I do so, there are a couple things I want to address. First, we’ll answer who it was that had come to “take charge of Jesus.” Then we will answer whether or not Jesus was in fact being dishonorable to his mother. What was Jesus really saying here about being part of God’s family? And finally, we’ll address what Jesus is saying to us today.

Throughout the Gospel of Mark, we see a literary device that bible scholars call “Markan sandwiches.” What I mean by that is that Mark bookends a certain concept, which in this case is the story of Jesus driving out demons, by two similar topics. The bookends here just happen to be Jesus’ family coming to “take charge of him” on one end and them arriving at the house where Jesus is staying on the other.

You’ll notice these sort of things throughout the Gospel of Mark.

The truth is that Jesus had created quite a stir that made the religious folk uneasy. Which in turn made his family concerned for his and their wellbeing. This was why they excused his actions as “being out of his mind.”

So who was it that came for him? And why did they come?

The text tells us that it was Jesus’ mother, Mary, and his brothers, which Matthew names as James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. Notice that Jesus’ step father, Joseph, was not named here which leads us to believe that he had died sometime between Jesus disappearance in the temple when he was twelve and the beginning of Jesus public ministry now at thirty years old. We know from other places that Jesus also had sisters, but in the ancient Hebrew culture it would have been improper for them to have accompanied their mother and brothers here.

The text also tells us that they had come to “take charge of him.” The Greek word for take charge of is *krateo*. It means to grasp, take hold of, seize or retain. There is a sense of physical restraint implied here. Perhaps in the same way that students across the country have taken charge of their campuses in protest over Israel’s war in Gaza.

His mother and brothers had come to physically seize Jesus and take him home because they thought he had lost his mind. The Greek word for lost his mind is *existemi*. It means to be out of one’s wits, bewitched, or insane. They thought Jesus had lost his marbles!

When they finally arrived where Jesus was staying, such a large crowd had gathered that they couldn’t even sit down to eat dinner. So his family told the crowd to tell Jesus that they were outside and insisting that he come home with them. NOW!

That's when Jesus said to his disciples, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"

Now I confess that Jesus' answer seems a little snippy, right? Perhaps even a little bit dishonorable. If I had ever said anything of the sort to my mother, when she had come to "take charge of me," I would have gotten an earful, if not a handful. Get my drift. I don't care how ever old I would have been. Our mothers brought is into the world, but no matter how old we might be, they can still take us out of it! Right?

Now we know by other areas of scripture that Jesus was without sin, so his response could not have been dishonorable to his mother, otherwise he would have broken the fourth commandment. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth, "God made [Jesus] sin who had no sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."³

The Author of Hebrews claimed, [Jesus was able to sympathize with our weakness and was tempted in every way we are, but was without sin.]⁴

And yet again, Peter quoted the Prophet Isaiah claiming that the Messiah, "committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."⁵

So if we believe that Jesus was without sin, which would have been an absolute requirement for being God's perfect sacrifice for sin, then Jesus could not have been dishonoring his mother here.

What then was really going on?

We get a clue by other places in scripture where we see Jesus interacting with his family.

In the Gospel of Luke at the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus was rejected in his own hometown of Nazareth when he stood up in his home synagogue on the Sabbath to read from the Torah, and claimed that the scripture was fulfilled in their hearing that day by him. Everyone was in shock. No, they were furious and drove him out of town to a cliff in order to throw him off it.⁶ That's a pretty strong opinion of his preaching if you ask me. Thank God there aren't and cliffs nearby here!

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus taught people in his hometown synagogue with such conviction that people wondered where he had gotten such wisdom and ability to do miraculous powers... They knew his family and had watched him grow up. They asked, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name

³ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁴ Hebrews 4:14, my paraphrase

⁵ 1 Peter 2:22, Isaiah 53:9

⁶ Luke 4:14-30

Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Aren't all his sisters here with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" So they took offense at him.

Jesus said, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor."⁷

So it wasn't so much that Jesus dishonored his mother. But I wonder if it was the other way around. Jesus' mother and brothers dishonored him because of their lack of faith regarding what Jesus said about himself. He was the Son of God.

We know that his family struggled to believe in him throughout his life. It wasn't until after his death and resurrection that his brothers, James and Jude, came to faith in Jesus as their Messiah. We see that James became a leader in the Jerusalem church and writer of the book of James. And Jude later described himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James who authored a very small letter just before the Book of Revelation written to the early churches warning them against false teachers.

But going deeper still, I wonder if what Jesus was doing was further distancing himself from his physical family while setting the stage for explaining who would be part of God's adopted family. You see the Jews had a special claim on being part of God's family because of their physical lineage which traced back to Abraham as their father.

In the Gospel of John, we see early on how many Jews struggled to believe that Jesus was the Son of God. He challenge them that if they believed in him that they would become part of God's family. But they fired back, "Abraham is our father."

Jesus said, "If you were Abraham's children, then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things [by breaking the sixth commandment]. You are doing things your own father does."

"We are not illegitimate children," they protested, "The only Father we have is God himself."

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me... You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. Hew as a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who

⁷ Matthew 13:53-58

belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”⁸

So if physical birth does not gain us access as children into God’s family, what does?

At the beginning of his Gospel, John stated very clearly, “[Jesus] came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”⁹

To the Ephesians the Apostle Paul wrote, “For [Jesus] chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons and daughters through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - the the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely give us in the One he loves.”¹⁰

To the Galatians Paul wrote, “You are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Jesus Christ, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”¹¹

And yet again to the Romans Paul wrote, “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”¹²

So we see here that receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior in our lives through faith is what awards us adoption as children in God’s family. Not birthright. That way God’s family is open to all people, through all time, and not just those who claim to be Abraham’s physical descendants. It’s a brilliant move on Jesus’ part, if you ask me.

But probably somewhat of a difficult pill for Jesus’ family to swallow none the less.

How then does this relate to us today?

⁸ John 8:31-47

⁹ John 1:12-13

¹⁰ Ephesians 1:4-6

¹¹ Galatians 3:26-29

¹² Romans 8:15-17

Each of us have to wrestle with Jesus' question "Are we part of Jesus' family, nor not?" Just because we were raised in a Christian home or went to church all our lives doesn't earn us access into God's family. How we answer that question for ourselves changes everything with how we see ourselves and how we relate to the world.

I'll close with this, as Jesus lay dying on the cross with his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene by his side. He looked over at his mother and the disciple who Jesus loved standing nearby, Jesus said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."

Even in his death, Jesus had a much bigger and more gracious picture of what God's family looked like than we often do.

So may we honor Jesus today by believing that he was who he said he was. May we know that we are adopted by faith into God's family, not by physical genealogy. And may we likewise have a bigger and more gracious picture of who is part of God's family of faith.

Amen.