

Second Sunday after the Pentecost - Proper 5, Year B June 6, 2021 (Mark 3: 20 - 35)

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We are just beginning the long journey of Pentecost, so we might as well hunker down for the long haul. But the pace of the story in Mark's gospel will not let us relax. Having only just begun, in these first few chapters Jesus has whirled through Galilee: baptized at the Jordan, the Spirit alights on him and God's choice is pronounced; he announces the presence of God's kingdom and calls for a response to this good news; he walks by the sea and summons fishermen to follow and they leap from their boats in obedient response; in a synagogue he teaches with an astounding authority, but a kind of secrecy enshrouds him which only the demoniac seems to recognize; yet a secret power breathes from him that will not be contained, as witnessed by the numerous events of healing that mark his route. This is God's chosen, after all, and if the kingdom is indeed at hand, then we might well ask, "How is one supposed to act in the presence of God?"

In this reading, now Jesus comes home. How it will play out in his hometown? Even with all the excitement, the reports and the prospects have not been good. As he heals and draws crowds and disciple followers, he has to skirt around in the border regions and escape to the mountains. Already only this far in the story the Pharisees and the Herodians conspire how they can destroy him. So when at the beginning of today's reading we join the crowds, packed together so tightly that they cannot even get their arms free to grab some food, we sense that somebody has to do something to restore some order. Who gets called to restore some order?

His family, of course. They should know how to deal with him. And for that, is his family ready? Yes, they come ready with restraints to shackle his body and with charges to tame his outlandish speech: "he's out of his mind; you don't really need to listen to him." And the scribes from Jerusalem add a religious stamp to the charges: "he is actually in league with the demonic powers." That should show his insignificance to the crowds. Those in the know have the essential facts to discount his person and his credentials. Together, they all say, "Enough about this Jesus. The threats to the ordering of society, family, and religion have been thwarted once again."

And I am getting increasingly sick of hearing the same refrain today...about the threats to the ordering of society, family, and religion. It goes on, ad nauseum...and I am going off, all in the name of "family values". The great, high moral phrase of the Pharisees of today, those so-called religious intolerants of anybody and anything that does not fit THEIR narrative, not God's. Those who do not want to have a discourse because they are certain...CERTAIN...that the kingdom of God

is reserved only for those who would rather preach non-stop about their vision, their version of proper Christian and family values, all the while hiding or ignoring the members of their own blood who are gay, drug addicted, under educated, or...worst of all...are not like them, perfect to the outer world. The worst of the lot, in my knowledge, is the Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas, that prays for and celebrates the death of our armed service members, and even planned to protest at the funeral of former Vice President Biden's son. On this anniversary weekend of D-Day in World War II, may God have mercy on their souls.

They, and unfortunately many of the other so-called churches in town, miss out on the REAL talk about the "kingdom" and about who has authority and power...that being God, of course. But to those who have ears to hear, and not an agenda to shout over others, hopefully Jesus makes sense and calls us to consider deeply just what is going on here: to rethink what the story of this Jesus might have to do with how we imagine our world and the ways of God with God's creation. What is it that God is calling us to see and hear in this Jesus? Who is it that has the power to change our world, and how is that power going to be exercised in those of us who are called to journey along with this Jesus in this Pentecost Season? Who dares to actually see and hear that God is slowly answering our Lord's Prayer: Your kingdom come, your will be done?

Your mother and your brothers are outside waiting on you, calling for you," one of the disciples said to Jesus. "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" Jesus replied. "Any one who does my will, anybody who gets on board with my movement, that's my family," he said, having some strange ideas about family.

Hey, I love my family. But I am sorry to tell you that "family values" was not really a Jesus' thing. We know all about the kin of the prophet Mohammed, but we know next to nothing about the family of Jesus. Mark says that Jesus had brothers and sisters, but what do we know about them? That family plays a remarkably negligible role in his story. In his ministry, Jesus thought nothing of disrupting a family business with "Follow me," demanding that these fishermen abandon their aging father in the boat and join Jesus as he wandered about with his buddies. "I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother," Jesus threatened. "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, can't be my disciple." That's a text rarely used by the church on Mother's Day. What is up?

The gospels tell that the chief focus of his mission was to reconstitute the scattered lost sheep of Israel. He left his biological kin to form a new family based not on genetic kinship..the way we make family...but rather upon the gracious, barrier-breaking summons of God. He got into trouble for practicing a scandalously open-handed table fellowship, calling the lost and orphaned back

home. "This man eats and drinks with SINNERS!...one of the earliest and most persistent claims against Jesus, who is forming a new family composed of those who had difficulty fitting in with their human families.

Our human family, for any of its virtues, is just too small, too closely circumscribed. Pastors spend much time in counseling helping people get over the damage done to them in their family. "And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand ... Who are my mother and my brothers?" Have you found yourself asking these questions in this season of family picnics and graduations? These events certainly elicit questions about loyalties and families of origin; wait, these people are really my relatives? While occasions such as these are undoubtedly cause for much celebration they can also admittedly be times of tension and unmentioned disharmony.

Maybe this is the Sunday to tell the truth about the divisions in our lives that we have swept under the rug; to tell the truth about the toll that they take on our lives, not for simple resolution but to name the truth that this is the kind of world in which we live; not for effortless reunion but to call attention to this reality of our worlds because it does take a toll. And perhaps what it comes down to is how we choose to deal with the truth. If we choose to allow the inevitability of division to dominate our way of being in the world, then what Jesus' claims will indeed be our world, who will be able to stand?

You see, some people seem to thrive on disagreement and division. There are churches, denominations, institutions that would rather find any and all potentiality for discord...to prove themselves right, to justify their own positions, beliefs...than to do the hard work of searching for avenues of possible agreement. We know these people. We know these churches. We know these communities. And they have the very real probability of the kind of destruction from which no recreation is possible. Because that is the issue, is it not?

To seek paths and possibilities that lead to relationship means that the end result will be the hard work of relationship maintenance, as if reconciliation means disremembering.

Life after disagreement and reconciliation is not about forgetting. It is not about pretending that nothing ever happened. It is about letting go of the fact that the past can be changed and choosing to live in the present reality that the relationship has changed. It can never go back to the way it was before. Yet, many would rather sever the ties altogether than live with the memory of ties that were broken. Many would rather abandon people and community for their own self-justification than to admit their own contributions to the problem. And many would rather stir up the proverbial pot than sense opportunities for kindness, graciousness, and gratitude.

The answers will call for a people who are aware of the risk of listening to the wrong

sources, who are aware of the risk of joining in the wrong words whose error becomes so much blasphemy. Blasphemy, in this community. In this Jesus, the Spirit of God is at work, at the beginning in the descent of God's Spirit upon him at his baptism. God's benediction on him has been pronounced; the promise is that in his journey among and with us God will be at work. To question or reject that presence and the signs of this kingdom is to risk missing out on the good news that God has in store for us in the person and message of this Jesus.

The fact is, we are in a constant state of relational negotiation. The question is, how we choose to live in that state...to pretend that it does not exist or to recognize its constant existence; to ignore its difficulty or to search in the difficulty for love; to mourn its challenges or to accept its reality.

May God help us to find that balance of loving our own but in the way he first loves us, all in the relationship and beauty of God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.