

## ***Who is My Mother, My brothers, My Family?***

***Mark 3:19b-35***

***May 12, 2019***

Mark's Gospel presents Jesus in these early chapters as a one on the move. His life is a flurry of activity: healing different maladies, driving out evil spirits, teaching, debating with the religious rulers, and through it all, making the religious establishment very uneasy, even angry. His popularity is such that he can't get a moment's peace. Mark tells us that Jesus went home, and by this he means to his house in Capernaum. It has become his centre of operations. But even home is no longer a sanctuary. Everywhere he goes crowds press him. Mark tells us that he tries to find relief by heading to the Sea of Galilee. But a multitude followed him. They came from all over Israel. He tells the disciples to *have a boat ready because of the crowd so they won't crush him.* (Mark 3:9) His reputation as a healer has travelled far and wide. Later that crowd has gathered around his house so that they can't even eat in peace. Life has become so demanding for him and his disciples that they have no peace even to eat. (vs. 20,21)

Two groups enter the scene. First come the scribes from Jerusalem and confront him with their attacks on his ministry. They accuse him of being in league with the devil. He works with Beelzebub which is a Canaanite divine name applied by them to the prince of darkness. Jesus answers them by arguing that Satan wouldn't fight against himself. Neither him, nor a kingdom, nor a house can be divided against itself or they will collapse. Then comes the final word of warning to the religious leaders:

*Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."*

What is this unpardonable sin? Let me suggest that what Jesus is warning against is very specific. It is not simply a rejection of God. Here the scribes, who have come from Jerusalem to set the simple folks of Galilee right by arguing that this man is a fraud. Jesus is really in league with the devil when he casts out demons. In their

hard, conservative hearts they seek to delude the people into believing that this is not the Holy Spirit at work. In fact it is Satan. Their hearts are callous and they seek to delude others. Jesus is warning them that this unbelief puts them on the brink of eternal ruin. Jesus does not necessarily declare that the scribes are already condemned, but he warns them gravely of their precarious position.

It seems to me that today it is very difficult to be certain what this unpardonable sin is. It certainly warns us about being persistently hard of heart and unapologetically unbelieving of God message of salvation found in Jesus Christ. The good news, of course, is that the message of the cross is that God will forgive all sins to those who come in repentance and faith and bow to the Lordship of Jesus.

Jesus' family has also come over from Nazareth, a good days walk. Most of us would think that at least his family would get what Jesus is trying to do and would support him. But apparently not! Mark tells us that they have heard people say that he is "out of his mind". The translation from Greek simply means, *to stand outside of*, or in common parlance, Jesus is **out of his mind**. So they come to try to restrain him and bring him back with them to Nazareth.

Perhaps they are concerned that his mission is creating a serious conflict with the religious authorities and poses a real threat to his life. What he is teaching on the kingdom, his reputation as a healer, his open disregard for the Jewish laws on the Sabbath: all of this is so provocative and so much against the status quo of Jewish religious life and teaching that they have decided to bring him home. Maybe they fear that all this popularity has gone to his head.

In verses 31 and following Mark picks up the narrative of the family again. They can't get into the house for the crowds of people crushing inside and outside the door, so they send a message into the house. Mary says to tell him that his mother, his brothers and sisters are outside asking for him. They want to rescue him and take him home where life can become normal again for him.

Jesus response seems scandalous and cruel:

*Who do you think are my mother and brothers?" Looking around, taking in everyone seated around him, he said, "Right here, right in front of you—my mother and my brothers. Obedience is thicker than blood. The person who obeys God's will is my brother and sister and mother (Mark 3:33ff, The Message).*

Wow! Now that is not what we might expect! To think that my Christian family is more intimately related to me than my blood relatives is a strange idea. And on mother's day of all days!

My dear mother, Annabelle Buick, had a hard life with four boys, limited finances, and a somewhat distant husband. She found it difficult to warm to motherhood. Indeed, as a teenager I took every opportunity to visit with her sister, my aunt Ella. She, I think, should have been a mother. Ella, like thousands of young women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, lost their fiancées and prospective husbands to the Great War of 1914-18. To this day I often wish my relationship with my mother could have been as warm as it was with my aunt.

Things didn't improve when I became a Christian. My mother was never supportive or understanding. Truth is my parents never expressed any interest in the faith. Although I was told that when my father was young he used to walk back and forward in the living room with a bible in his hand, pretending to be a preacher. I don't know if that stayed with him, for we rarely talked about personal faith or heart issues. My father died in his late 50's so I knew my mother much longer as an adult. As hard as I tried to share my faith with her and my brothers it always seemed to meet pretty strong apathy.

On a personal note I remember so many times when my dear aunt Ruby, another of my mother's sisters, would plead with me to return to my roots and forget all this *religious mumbo jumbo*. Just be myself was her plea. Don't be so religious! Both her and my mother were dumfounded at my choices in life; why would I abandon my career potential for the life in the church? What do you say to that?

Yes, this is difficult for me personally to talk about my mother on this Mother's Day. But the reality is that my relationship with God through Jesus and the Spirit has birthed in you and me a new way of looking at life and has caused a huge shift in our priorities and attitudes. As a

young Christian I found a new family. My own brother, Ernest, who had become a Christian in Canada and through whom I had found a door into the faith, became a close brother in the faith. And Christians in my first church in Toronto, like Grant Cook and his wife Irene, took me under their wing and were so supportive and inspiring to me. Very early on I discovered that the church, the body of Christ, was now my mother, my father, my brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles. The truth is, however sad that might sound, is that often we as Christians have more in common with our Christian family than we do with our blood relatives who are outside the faith.

So on this Mother's Day let us celebrate our mothers, both in our biological family but also our mothers in the faith. My dear Ruby Poth was one such mother in the faith for me. She was the heart of a small rural church I was called to serve as a student back in the 70's. I think of her as a gentle, loving, caring mother to all she met. She was for me. I celebrate Ruby today, as well as my own mother, bless them both. Ruby truly supported me in my faith journey. That support was amazing for me as a young Christian.

Jesus' family was at odds with his mission in this early reading in Mark. But things would change. In the end his mother and his brothers and also his sisters all embraced him as Lord and followed him. Indeed, his brother James would become the leader of the church in Jerusalem. And his mother, who comes under the wing of John the disciple, would support her Son's mission to the end.

***Amen***