

The Family is Idoling – June 14, 2015
By Wayne J. Schneider – Soli Deo Gloria

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St. Mark 3:20-35

In U. S. North America today is between two cultural celebrations driven by Hallmark and other businesses: Mother's and Father's Day. Our gospel lesson for today does indeed illuminate the family, but it's focus is quite different. These verses also shine light on a different Jesus than we are used to. This Jesus is not the gentle Jesus, meek and mild, as portrayed with freshly scrubbed and well-behaved children, or holding a lammie-pie in his arms.

Rather, St. Mark paints a portrait with vibrant colors that shout both actions and vocabulary that astound and render us speechless, as He did people of His day. In His time the family was everything: security, social standing, and for widows and orphans who were the most vulnerable, a safety net.

Even today in the Middle East family honor is a life and death matter, as we often see on news reports. We have heard horrific stories of appalling consequences for those who may have brought shame upon their families.

Jesus delivers a blow to the body when He criticizes His family who seem to have embarrassed Him. When His family heard that huge crowds were gathering around Jesus *“they came to take control of Him, and they were saying He is out of His mind.”* When Jesus was told His family had arrived, He explains who is His real family: *“Whoever does the will of God”* (v. 35).

Most of us don't enjoy conflict so this rupture in relationship, this hostility from others outside Jesus' immediate family is characterized by their saying, *“He has Beelzebul, and by the rule of the demons he casts out demons.”* Both oppositions originate from the same place: Jesus won't behave in a way that both want him to. Jesus does not live like one of them.

If you look back at chapters one and two of St. Mark you will discover that Jesus is indeed unusual. When John the Baptist is jailed, Jesus doesn't stop preaching repentance and the Kingdom of God. He does not endear himself to the religious leaders by hanging

out with the wrong people and brought dishonor on Himself by healing lepers, restoring mobility, and performing exorcisms. More complaints followed to the point where Jesus was Himself accused of being possessed by “*Beelzebub, a ruler of demons.*”

The long-time enemy of Israel, the Philistines, worship Beelzebul. “Baal,” was the God of the Canaanites, and “Beel” is the Greek word for “Baal.” To place Jesus’ name next to Beel was to say He was just another idol.

Jesus is never without a creative or powerful answer. He speaks of a “*kingdom divided against itself.*”

Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this passage in *The Message* is useful. "*Does it make sense to send a devil to catch a devil, to use Satan to get rid of Satan? A constantly squabbling family disintegrates. If Satan were fighting Satan there soon wouldn't be any Satan left.*"

Jesus’ point is that if He isn’t transforming people by Satan’s power, then it must be by the power of God. The question for those who falsely accuse Him then is, why would you oppose me, calling what I do Satan’s work?

In verses 29-30, Jesus shares harsh words compared to the forgiveness in verse 28. He announces that there is an unpardonable sin. Earlier, Jesus called His family, His accusers, and the religious leaders to listen to what He has to say regarding blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This sin is an act of disobedience against God in saying the work of the Holy Spirit is the word of the devil, denying God by rejecting the One sent by God.

Thomas Howard calls Jesus, “Christ the Tiger.” I like this more than the Jesus, meek and mild. These words are disturbing for us as they were for His mother and family. It might be difficult for us to hear these words if we fear we might have wondered if we have committed this unpardonable sin of being defiant toward God.

We must not think here that committing this unforgiveable sin is an inadvertent word about the Holy Spirit, or an unbelief or doubt or a willful sin. Instead, it is a habitual rejection of Jesus as God’s Son and proclaimer of the Kingdom of God.

We can be reassured knowing that when we are wrestling with these things, it is a sign of the Holy Spirit’s work within you. The unpardonable sin is rejecting God’s love

and forgiveness. We could say that those who “*out of their minds*” are the ones who do not accept God’s free gift. Those who cast their lot with Jesus in doing and being the will of God are a new family, what the New Revised Standard Version names, “*The True Kindred of Jesus.*”

Those who live in God’s New Life are the new community of faith, people who demonstrate the rule of God in the world, breaking the devil’s kingdom by building the Kingdom of God. Alleluia. Amen.