

Who Is Your Family? —June 12, 2016

By Wayne J. Schneider — Soli Deo Gloria (To God alone goes the glory)

## Who is Your Family?

St. Mark 3:20-35

Today finds us in between two commercial festivities built around the family: Mother's Day last month and Father's Day this month. And today is the day, also on a Sunday 50 years ago, Sylvia and Wayne were married. So, I thought the family an appropriate sermon topic for this morning. Today's gospel lesson speaks of family but in a different way than TV presented family in the 50's and 60's. In these verses we discover a not-so-gentle Jesus.

Most of us have seen portrayed the pastel colored pictures of Jesus sitting with a group of passive, cleaned-up, non-middle Eastern children; or with a cute little lamb in his arms surrounded by sheep. What St. Mark give us however, is dazzling colors, actions and words that astonish and stagger us, just as they did those around Jesus.

In Jesus' day the family was the foundation of the Society. It provided sanctuary for its members. Widows and orphans were especially vulnerable without a family. People's social standing came from their family.

Honor in the family then and now is a matter of life and death. We have heard the stories of disfigurement and death to those who have been seemed to have brought dishonor to their families in Middle-Eastern culture.

When Jesus speaks to his family he uses vocabulary that appears to bring dishonor to them. When they hear he is attracting large crowds, "They went out to restrain him, for people were saying, '*he has gone out of his mind.*'" (v. 21) When informed that his earthly family was asking after him, Jesus identifies the true family not by heritage, but by "*Whoever does the will of God.*" (v. 35) These words may be challenging to understand, because it appears as if there is a conflict between Jesus and his family of origin, who have perhaps misinterpreted his ministry.

Resistance comes from other places as well. Jesus faith family and the Jewish religious leadership, have declared him to be 'out-of-his-mind.' Worse, they have stated that "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts

out demons.” (v. 22) This family disapproval comes because Jesus is not acting like people want him to act.

A summary stroll through the preceding chapters of St. Mark reveal that Jesus is different. Even after John the baptizer is arrested (1 :14-15) Jesus preaches God’s Kingdom is here and asks people to repent, to change direction 180 degrees.

One the main things that riled the religious, was that Jesus hung out with those who lived on ‘the other side of the tracks.’ He healed lepers, the ‘untouchables,’ he rubbed shoulders with the unclean,’ and was an exorcist. He did not question God’s laws but how the religious leaders interpreted the Law, and the laws that the religious leaders had added to the Law. Criticism of him gained so much momentum, that he was alleged to be possessed by an evil power, Beelzebul, the head of all demons.

Beelzebul was an idol the Philistines worshiped. You may remember Philistia was a longtime enemy of Israel. “Beel” is Greek for Baal, the Canaanite God of the Hebrew Scriptures. To join Jesus with this idol was a dastardly deed, indeed.

But Jesus is creative and his response is up to the test. Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of this passage in *The Message* is helpful as Jesus replies, “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.

If I were on a debate team I’d want Jesus on my side, wouldn’t you? Jesus is saying that if he wasn’t changing people’s lives by satanic power then, it must be by God’s power. What he is asking his accusers is: Why are you against what I am doing by calling it the work of the devil?

Jesus uses heavy-duty words in w.29-30 compared to v. 28. He speaks of the unforgiveable in. Way back in verse 23, Jesus called those who accuse him to listen to what he says regarding blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which he names “*an eternal sin*” against which there is no pardon, for they said, ‘ he has an unclean spirit.’” (v. 30) This sin against the Holy Spirit is calling its work the work of the devil, rejecting God by rejecting Jesus.

Remember the pastel picture of Jesus meek and mild. I Jesus is not here. The words are upsetting for us as they must have been for his family and the religious leaders. Hearing these words is difficult for us, because it makes us wonder if we have done this unforgivable sin of defiance against God.

Have hope, my friend. What we are speaking about is not some careless comment about the Holy Spirit or some disbelief at a point in your life. It is instead, a persistent rejection of Jesus. Christ. We can take courage and comfort knowing that our grappling with these subjects is in itself a sign of the Holy Spirit working in you.

Returning to our Gospel lesson, we can actually say those who try to stop God's healing and wholeness, are the ones who are "out of their minds."

Those who actively and willingly strive to live God's way, are the new family of faith, people who radiate God's design for the world. Would that also include you?

Alleluia. Amen.