

“Misunderstood”
Mark 3:20-35
Sermon #103
6.6.21
Second Sunday After Pentecost
65th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Mark 3:20-35 CEB

20 Jesus entered a house. A crowd gathered again so that it was impossible for him and his followers even to eat. **21** When his family heard what was happening, they came to take control of him. They were saying, “He’s out of his mind!”

22 The legal experts came down from Jerusalem. Over and over they charged, “He’s possessed by Beelzebul. He throws out demons with the authority of the ruler of demons.”

23 When Jesus called them together he spoke to them in a parable: “How can Satan throw Satan out? **24** A kingdom involved in civil war will collapse. **25** And a house torn apart by divisions will

collapse. **26** If Satan rebels against himself and is divided, then he can't endure. He's done for. **27** No one gets into the house of a strong person and steals anything without first tying up the strong person. Only then can the house be burglarized. **28** I assure you that human beings will be forgiven for everything, for all sins and insults of every kind. **29** But whoever insults the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. That person is guilty of a sin with consequences that last forever.”**30** He said this because the legal experts were saying, “He’s possessed by an evil spirit.”

31 His mother and brothers arrived. They stood outside and sent word to him, calling for him. **32** A crowd was seated around him, and those sent to him said, “Look, your mother, brothers, and sisters are outside looking for you.”

33 He replied, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” **34**

Looking around at those seated around him in a circle, he said,

“Look, here are my mother and my brothers. **35** Whoever does God’s will is my brother, sister, and mother.”

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I love this story. People are trying to intimidate Jesus in order to control him and he doesn’t bend. It’s the first thing that happens after Jesus appoints the twelve disciples and before he tells the

parable of the soils. Jesus' own family doesn't understand him.

The legal experts, who know Jesus since he was trained as a Rabbi, refuse to understand him.

This got me thinking about some things.

Let's start with the legal experts first.

Jesus was trained as a good Jew. He was a revered Rabbi as he had a lot of followers crammed into this house. He knows these experts. He's probably done a lot of sparring and debating with them over the years. These are religious insiders. And hear me when I say this: I am not here to demonize the scribes and

pharisees. Mark, along with the other Gospels, tends to caricaturize the religious officials to make a point. So, keep that in mind. But, Mark is making a point here. Those who are the religious insiders refuse to get it. Jesus heals because he is the Son of God, not because he's Satan. These people are trying to discredit Jesus.

Then there's Jesus' own family. These are the people who have known him his whole life. You'd think they understand Jesus is the Son of God who has some important stuff to do. But, they're freaking out because Jesus has a large gathering in a house. His own family is saying "he's out of his mind!"

There's all this anxiety from the family, from Jesus' religious colleagues, and even people in the crowd are brought into the

middle of these strange dynamics. Just look at verses 31-32.

Jesus' family is trying to find him to control him. Calling for him.

His family uses some in the crowd to help make a triangle in order to take the stress off the family.

Jesus doesn't take the bait. He doesn't take the bait from the scribes nor from his family. Family and religious colleagues are trying to get between Jesus and the crowd. Jesus puts the scribes in their place and tells the family that even though they may be related by blood, true family members are the ones who do the will of God. Those are Jesus' family. Not the ones who may be related to him by blood who also think he has lost his mind for doing what he's supposed to be doing. These are Jesus' family. Not the ones who are religious insiders, but the ones who do the will of God.

Why are people freaking out over Jesus with the large group in an overcrowded house? How could something so innocent as Jesus being with a large group of people trigger his family and the scribes?

Back in 1985, a Rabbi who was also a family therapist named Edwin H. Friedman published a groundbreaking book called *Generation to Generation*.¹ It was groundbreaking in that it helped develop the study of family systems. Of course, family systems being folks related to each other, but family systems can transfer into a congregation and workplace. All of us come from different family

¹ Edwin H. Friedman. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1985, pp. 19-39.

systems. And then we bring those things with us to work and church.

In today's passage, we get a glimpse into family systems, which can be both beautiful and terrifying. That's just the nature of humanity. We were created and God called us very good. Yet, we screw up. We are not perfect. And our imperfections influence our relationships with ourselves and each other whether we are related by blood or the Spirit.

There are three terms we should note together. Identified Patient, Homeostasis, and Triangulation.

Identified Patient. Let's say a group has lots of dysfunctions. But, instead of actually working out the problems as a whole, they find someone in the system to blame in order to relieve themselves of the responsibility to address the root causes of the dysfunction. That's what we have here. Jesus' family and religious colleagues are unhealthy systems and they're trying to control Jesus in order to soothe their own faults. People are trying to fix him, but he has done nothing wrong. In fact, he is doing what he's supposed to do: The will of God the Father. He is going out because God is on the loose. And it is troubling to his family and the scribes. "He's out of his mind!!!!!" "He's possessed by Satan!!!!!" When people are startled by someone who is doing something right, they will resort to insults because they don't have anything else to contribute.

Homeostasis. It's another term for balance. Every system has a status quo. Status quo isn't always unhealthy, but sometimes it is. For example, when someone has been allowed to bully others in a system and they've gotten away with it, that's normal for that particular system. However, bullies are not healthy. Bullying is not normal, no matter how much they've been normalized. But, when people are allowed to behave inappropriately in a family, congregation, or workplace because others don't want to offend and upset the balance, people will tolerate the bullies and complainers. In Mark 3:20-35, Jesus upsets the homeostasis.....he upsets the balance. He's going out to the people and it's upsetting to his own family and the scribes. And remember, Jesus has a habit of hanging out with all types of sinners. So, while the type of people aren't described, let's assume he's in a house full of tax collectors, gentiles, and prostitutes. The audacity of Jesus being

so loving and compassionate toward people who are considered sub-human! How dare he!!!!!!

And then there's **triangulation**. Any time you have three parties. For example, two parties need a mediator. That's not a bad thing. A child tells one parent that they broke the other parent's favorite drill. Again, not necessarily a bad thing as the child wants to tell the truth but doesn't know how to tell the other parent. And then there are triangles that are unhealthy. For example, when someone goes up to another and says: "People are saying....." Yeah, when someone says "people are saying", it's usually because people don't want to own their own emotions and that's what happens here in today's verses. Some from the crowd are put in a triangle by the family to

look for Jesus because his own family won't admit their own feelings.

Family systems are complex. In our own families, congregations, and workplaces, there are different ways family systems are operating. And because of our humanity, our relationships are imperfect. Our imperfections affect everything we do. But, our imperfections DON'T have the last word. God's love for us has the last word.

Jesus was sent to the last and least of these. His family called him "out of his mind" and the religious officials falsely claimed Jesus was getting his powers from Satan because he was throwing out demons. But, Jesus in a loving way put the scribes back in their

place. He didn't play their game. He didn't dance to their tune. He threw it right back at them and told them to actually think about what they were saying. "How can Satan throw Satan out?"

And then Jesus' family sends others after him.

"Look, your mother, brothers and sisters are outside looking for you!"

Jesus replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Looking around at those seated around him in a circle, he said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother, sister, and mother."

Doing the will of God has consequences. Your own families will think you're crazy. Church people will think you're possessed by an

evil spirit. Others will be brought in by your family members and colleagues to try to “fix you”. Don’t play that game. None of us have time for it. Instead, do what Jesus did: Remain faithful. The Holy Spirit will be your constant companion as you discern God’s will. The Holy Spirit will illumine your hearts and minds as you are led to those crowded gatherings where the sinners hang out.

“Whoever does God’s will is my brother, sister, and mother.” That’s family. It goes deeper than work relationships. It goes deeper than blood. It goes deeper than simply belonging to the same church as someone else. People will misunderstand you. People will try to create obstacles to make your life harder. But, as our Savior did in today’s story, we are to remain faithful and grounded.

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.