

The Most Important Family

Mark 3:20-35 (NIV)

²⁰ Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." ²² And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." ²³ So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. ²⁷ In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house. ²⁸ I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. ²⁹ But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." ³⁰ He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit." ³¹ Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." ³³ "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. ³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" ³⁵ Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

When you think of Jesus, do you remember that he had an earthly family? You remember that the Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem and Joseph, her husband, served as Jesus' earthly father. But did you know that Jesus had brothers – four of them, in fact: James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon – as well as sisters. This section from Mark is one of those rare times that we hear about them.

At this point in Jesus' public ministry, he has recently called 12 men to be his close disciples while he is also gaining in popularity. Enter our verses today from Mark: "Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" (verses 20-21) Isn't that just like a mom to make sure that her boy is still eating right and taking care of himself?

Family is a wonderful gift from God, given right after he made the very first man and first woman. He declared that when coming together to get married the man and woman would leave their father and mother and these two would become one flesh, the most intimate relationship of any relationship on earth. The husband and wife care for each other and share their lives intertwining mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Then, God-willing, these two who have become one flesh in marriage have children. Moms and Dads take care of their children - feed them, provide for them, teach them life lessons, common sense.

God's gift of family gives us belonging, a belonging either through marriage or by blood. When you are connected to family, you help them, sometimes even when you basically have nothing to give to help them. When you are family, you forgive, often when you have been the one who is repetitively hurt by them. When someone speaks bad about your family – truthful or not – you snap to their defense because they are blood, they are family.

Sadly, God's perfect gift of family became corrupted almost as soon as he gave it. We heard about it in our first Bible reading today. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, to put their personal desire to improve themselves with wisdom over choosing to love God and his Word. Immediately, their relationship with God was wrecked. They hid from God, ashamed of what they had done. They couldn't be truthful with God anymore. Adam turned on his wife and God, blaming them for his act of selfish disobedience. Eve pinned the blame on the devil. As warned, they are given punishments of pain and ultimate death. And the corruption of family got even worse leading to their firstborn, Cain, murdering his brother, Abel.

Family trouble has continued ever since. Do I even need to state that? Take a look at your family. How is your relationship with your Mom and Dad? Your siblings? Your children? Your aunts and uncles? Your cousins? Is there anyone among our family and relatives who doesn't talk to you anymore – either because of harsh words that were said or because a distance that has grown over the years? Are there any grudges that you are holding against one of your family members or that one of them is holding against you? What regrets do you have with your family – things you should have done but didn't, words you wish you could take back or should have said but didn't, help you never gave or never received? How many fights have you had with your family – physical or verbal? When were you manipulated by a family member or you manipulated one of them for your own purpose and satisfaction? Has your family been physically and emotionally split by adultery, by divorce?

Our families break down because of sin. And before we start pointing the finger and saying, "But do you know what they did to me?" just take a look at yourself. What have you done to alienate family? What distance have you put between you and them? What have you done to cause harsh feelings or fights? Have we loved them as Christ loved us? All the selfish, sinful things we do tear apart our families and cause them to be divided against themselves. We tear them apart from the inside with what we do, sometimes out of ignorance, sometimes out of anger, sometimes even with the best intentions. Our families brought about by marriage and blood are broken and they do not endure because of my sins, what I do.

But family is still a blessing from God. Jesus' family probably had the best of intentions when they came for him that day. They wanted to make sure that he was taking care of himself. However, they made rash statements about Jesus being out of his mind, a phrase that Jesus' enemies used to then accuse Jesus of being possessed by demons or even the devil himself to do the miracles that he had been doing. And, yes, Jesus and his disciples were not able to eat because of the crowd, and that's a problem, but the people gathered there were hungrier for God's Word than he and his disciples were for food. Jesus made a call that day to feed this crowd with his Word instead of having a meal himself. Jesus' mother and brothers, even if they were good intentioned, wanted to take Jesus away from feeding this crowd with his life-giving and life-sustaining Word.

Once the message is passed on that Jesus' mother and brothers are looking for Jesus and intend to forcibly take him away from his sharing his Word, Jesus uses this as a teachable moment. He loves his Mom and his brothers and his sisters, but Jesus teaches us all about the most important family: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (verses 33-35) Jesus' family was not defined by blood relation or by marriage; his family was defined by who listens and believes his Word.

I know it may be very unpopular to say, but as wonderful as the gift of an earthly family is, a family created by blood relation or marriage, this kind of family cannot be the end all and be all of our lives. Our earthly families get broken, and we can't fix them. In fact, we are the cause of many of the family problems. And we can't make our earthly families last forever. Our earthly family is a shadow of a greater and a perfect family that we belong to. We belong to the family of God, a family that knows no bounds of blood or marriage relation. No one is excluded from being a part of this family. God openly invites all people to his family, a family perfected by the life and blood of Christ, a family that lasts for all eternity, a family that dwells altogether with God in heaven, not relegated into different levels with limited visitation rights, as if our families in heaven will be just as dysfunctional there as there are here. God's family, Jesus' mother and brothers and sisters, are those who listen to his Word and do his will. God's family are brought together as God brings us to believe that he paid for our sins, that his perfection covered over us. This family of God is perfect, one with no more fighting, no more alienation or estrangement, no more arguments, no more short-comings, no more unkind words.

You and I belong to the family of God right now through what Jesus did for us. The only downside is that we are a part of this wonderful family while also still fighting temptation and our sinful nature here on earth. This means that we will still do the things that tear apart families here on earth. Again, instead of pointing the finger at other people to blame them for the dysfunctional aspects of our church family, take a look at yourself. What do I do that may take people away from hearing God's Word, from being a part of God's family? Do I do anything to divide this house, this family of God? Whatever it is that I do that creates dysfunction in the family of God, forgive me. Ask that person that you affected negatively for them to forgive you. Then hear the words of God say to you that all your sins are forgiven. You are clothed with Christ's perfection as his Word dwells in your heart. You are still a part of God's family through faith in Christ as your Savior, the offspring of the woman, of Eve, who crushed the head of the serpent, of Satan. God used his gift of an earthly family to make us a part of his perfect and eternal family.

Since we are a part of God's family, a family that lasts forever united in God and by God, fight for this family. Fight for it by doing God's will. Fight for it by praying for this family of God that we would all remain true to his Word, that we would all continue to come and hear his Word week in and week out to continue to flourish as a part of God's family. With your actions, show people someone who values God most of all and who wants their earthly family all connected to him as well as all these other people around us in our community. Just like you would for your blood family, your family by marriage, defend these people who are a part of the family of God with you. Take their words and actions in the kindest possible way. Help them as God has enabled you. Build them up with your words of encouragement from God, to check on them when they don't come to church, to encourage them to come with you. Treat them better than your own blood family treats you. Enjoy this little preview of heaven with this family of God that you have here on earth.

This family of God, this family connected by the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ Jesus as our Savior from sin, this is the family that lasts forever. This is the perfect family because Christ's perfection covers over each and every single one of us in God's family. This is a family worth fighting for, a family that Jesus died for in order to bring us all together as one family with God. Amen.