

## **“Kingdom of God: Family Matters”**

Salado UMC—10 June 2018: Third after Pentecost

Preaching Text: Mark 3:20-35—Year B

Salado, Texas 76571

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**“Happy families are all alike;  
every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way”**

—( Leo Tolstoy (1828 - 1910, *Anna Karenina*).

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Mark 3:20 . . . and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21 When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” 22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” 23 And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27 But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

28 “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”—30 for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters[a] are outside, asking for you.” 33 And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:20-35, NRSV).

Many Bible readers note that Mark is an expert in “sandwiching” his Gospel stories. For example, a prime illustration of Mark’s literary technique which leaves readers dangling occurs in Mark 5:21-43. In this text we read two healing stories. First, Jairus’ twelve-year-old daughter is apparently near death. As leader of the local synagogue, Jairus, falls at Jesus’ feet and begs Jesus to heal her. Then as Jairus and Jesus depart, a woman interrupts Jesus and clutches his robe. Jesus inquires who touched him. The astonished disciples think this a ridiculous question. They ask: “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’ ” But Jesus stops and heals the woman who had a twelve-year flow of blood. Then Jesus and Jairus continue on their way to Jairus’ house. This is one example of several in Mark’s Gospel that use the literary strategy of “sandwiching.” While we are happy that Jesus heals the woman with the flow of blood, the question of urgency for the little girl remains. Of course, not to leave you in the lurch, Jesus raises the little girl.

Today, we see a similar literary technique of “sandwiching.” Jesus’ family comes to retrieve him for they fear that he has lost his mind. Why do they fear? It is natural in any family to want to protect our own or perhaps, to protect the family reputation from who knows what. We all have these concerns if we live in families. We can understand Jesus’ family and their concerns. I suspect all of us have loving family members concerned when we step out on our respective limbs a little too far.

Jesus’ family has concern for Jesus. Mark then interrupts, inserting some accusations against Jesus by the scribes—the day’s religious scholars. This insertion also provides a teaching moment for Jesus about Satan casting out Satan. Jesus also teaches that a house divided against itself cannot stand. We then read about the unpardonable sin—blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Then Mark goes back and tells us that Jesus’ mother and brothers had come. If we were to sew together the parts of the text that speak of Jesus and his family, then it would read like this:

[20] ...and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. [21] When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” [31] Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. [32] A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” [33] And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” [34] And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! [35] Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:20-35).

Long before Jesus had a family, the family was the focus of social relations. This circumstance extends back to Adam and Eve. We have all heard quips and pseudo-wisdom about families: Here are a few I uncovered this week:

**\*Blood is thicker than water.**

**\*No matter how many communes anybody invents, the family always creeps back. [Margaret Mead (1901-1978), American anthropologist]**

**\*Man is the head of the family, woman the neck that turns the head [Chinese aphorism].**

**\*I can't help detesting my relations. I suppose it comes from the fact that none of us can stand other people having the same faults as ourselves [Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), Anglo-Irish author].**

**\*God gives us our relatives; thank God we can choose our friends [Ethel Watts Mumford (1878-1940), American novelist, humorous writer].**

**\*The blues was like that problem child that you may have had in the family. You was a little bit ashamed to let anybody see him, but you loved him. You just didn't know how other people would take it [B. B. King (b. 1925) American blues guitarist].**

Notable in this Marcan passage is how Jesus’ family and the religious scholars of Jesus’ day seem lumped together as “outsiders.” Jesus’ flesh and blood family communicate via the crowd. They cannot get close enough to the house to bring him home. Jesus asks who his family is and he replies to his question: “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” Thus, Jesus sets up a new criterion for the human family. It is not the religious teachings you know that make you part of the family of Jesus, neither is it strictly blood-ties. Rather it is doing God’s will. God’s will is what makes us a part of Jesus’ family.

This idea may have been what Martin Luther had in mind when he wrote the hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” In this hymn, Luther crafts these words: “Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also. The body they may kill; God’s truth abideth still, God’s kingdom is forever.”

The implications of this teaching are fearsome or freeing—depending from which side of your family tree you happen to be suspended. Some will be scandalized that devotion to God is more important than devotion to family. This is clearly Jesus’ implication here. But for those from irregular families, to put it most politely, there is a great freedom in knowing that God has a family even for you. **EVEN FOR YOU!!**

Dr. Fred Craddock tells of a time when he and his wife Nettie were traveling in the Great Smoky Mountains and stopped at the Blackberry Inn in Tennessee. As they ate and relaxed before a grand picture window overlooking the valley below and old man came to the table and introduced himself. As they talked the man found out that Craddock was a preacher and he said, “Let me tell you a story. I was born back here in the mountains,” the man said.

My mother wasn’t married. In those days that was about the greatest shame a person could carry. When we went to town people looked at her and then at me, and I could tell they were trying to guess who my father was. It was painful and humiliating. I felt like nothing. At school the children made fun of me and had a name for me I can’t repeat. I hid. I ate my lunch alone. I started to go to church when I was 9 or 10 at a place called Laurel Springs. There was this preacher. A cranky, rough preacher. He had a bushy beard and a big voice. He scared me to death but fascinated me, too. I’d come in late to worship and leave right after the sermon because I was afraid that somebody would speak to me and say, ‘Where’s your Daddy anyway?’

One Sunday, after the sermon, people began filling the aisles to go to the altar and I couldn’t rush out as I usually did. I couldn’t get by! I began to sweat and shake all over. I said to myself, ‘Somebody’s going to stop me and expose my shame before the whole congregation! Make fun of me and wonder out loud who my father is!’ Suddenly, I felt this big hand on my shoulder, and I looked and it was this preacher! He said loud enough for everybody to hear: “Boy . . . Boy, you’re a child of . . . Boy, you’re a child of God . . . and I see a striking resemblance.’ He swatted me on the bottom and said: ‘Go and claim your inheritance.’ ”

The old man paused and Craddock said to him, “What’s your name?” The old man said, “Ben Hooper.” Craddock said: “Ben Hooper—Ben Hooper—Oh yeah—Ben Hooper. I remember my father telling me about the people of Tennessee twice electing an illegitimate Governor named Ben Hooper.”

The old man smiled and softly said: “I was born that day in that church” (this story told by Dr. Fred Craddock in a public lecture). And Jesus said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” Amen.

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