

Text: Mark 3:20-35
Theme: "One Big Family"
#959

Jim Gronbeck
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That old phrase, "You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family," is right on target.

It's very important to choose friends who will be positive influences on your life. But when it comes to family, you're pretty much stuck with what nature puts in front of you! Now, I'm not saying that this is good or bad; positive or negative. That's just the way it is. We can choose our spouse, but there are a whole lot of folks who come along with the deal that we have to live with. Then when our kids grow up and get married we have yet another set of family to get to know.

We normally think of family as our nuclear/biological, or our spouse's families, but today's Gospel presents us with yet another family. That is the Family of Christ—our brothers and sisters in Christ who are our family members through Holy Baptism.

Here again, we can choose the church we want to belong to, but on the whole, our church family comes along with the deal.

Then we have all those others—all the folks who are Christians all over the world. They're our family also! Friday and Saturday I was at the NW MN Synod Assembly in Moorhead along with our delegates Dean &

Lynn Greenwaldt. There were family members from all over the NW quarter of the state. There were visitors who talked about other ministries in the US and worldwide. They were family members too!

Jesus really expanded our understanding of family in today's Gospel. Jesus was working His way through Gentile territory and was attracting larger and larger crowds. He was saying things that the religious establishment didn't agree with. He was getting Himself into trouble by some of the things He was doing and saying.

So when Jesus' biological family heard about this, they were concerned and went to find Jesus. They were going to intervene on His behalf and presumably bring Jesus back to His home. Jesus, they thought, was 'beside himself' meaning they thought He was having emotional problems and was near a breakdown. They went to protect Jesus—to take Him home and let Him rest and get His thoughts and life back into sync with the rest of the family.

When Jesus heard of this, He was upset because they thought there was something wrong with Him. He was doing the will of His Heavenly Father. The religious leaders thought Jesus was demon-possessed. This really offended Him. He was not demon-possessed; rather it was the Holy Spirit that was at work with Him. He then said that those who speak ill of

the Holy Spirit—calling the Spirit within Him demonic—are guilty of the unforgiveable sin.

So Jesus told them that all who believe in Him and follow what God is calling us to do, are His sisters and brothers. Jesus gave us the gift of a much larger—and more diverse—family.

So look around you. It's okay! There are people we know well and people we haven't met yet. We're kind of a motley bunch. We did not handpick each other to be a sort of country club for Christians; we are here and are a part of this family because of Jesus Christ. Jesus has made us all part of His family in Baptism. We don't always agree on things, we may have very little in common with some, but we gather as family to do what our heavenly Father has called us to do. We come together to learn more about our faith and our family. We support one another as a family supports each other. We worship the One who has given us life and loves us unconditionally.

Today we are also learning about some more of our family who live in Jamaica. Through this involvement we meet people from other parts of our country who gather with us to help our sisters and brothers in Christ in Jamaica. We also meet our Jamaican family members and get to know them. As a congregation, we have either built or helped build 12 homes,

we have served for 12+ years at the Westhaven Children's home, and we have worked on projects at Clifton Boys' Home and the medical clinic mission. Our congregation has given money, time, resources, and most importantly Christian love to our Jamaican family. Today we celebrate that Mission Work that Zion has been doing by sending people to Jamaica, and by those who have shared much and haven't gone. We don't do this to bolster our own egos; we give out of Christian love for our family members down there.

Sharing our time, our resources, and our love with others is what God has called us to do. Our Christian Stewardship is about caring for our sisters and brothers and it's about reaching out to others who do not know Jesus as their Savior and Lord. It's about bringing others into the family of Christ regardless of where they live, their social standing, or anything else.

The interesting part of the Gospel today is seeing that Jesus is busy forming a new kind of family. His biological sisters, brothers, and mother are there, but Jesus pushes to show that those who do the will of God are also His family members. This unites us in Christ with all other believers; people we may know, people we may not know, people we may not even like.

It's one thing to put our biological families first in our lives. That is our responsibility and our joy. It is also our responsibility and our joy to care for family members in Christ—people we aren't related to, don't know, or don't understand very well. One of the things I appreciate about this congregation is that we are a conglomerate of people from different places, with different backgrounds, experiences, and we have many folks who are here only a short time during the summer months. We enjoy one another's fellowship and friendship. We are concerned about one another. We pray for each other and help one another. We see ourselves as a family here at Zion and all who join with us on Sunday mornings or during the week are also our family members. This is like a microcosm of the entire body of Christ.

Jesus did some very new and radical things. This really stretched the boundaries of what people could understand or accept. It caused His family to be concerned about his emotional health. It caused others to call Him demon-possessed.

But Jesus moved us into a new understanding of the Kingdom of God—one where all who follow God and do God's will are a part of the family. So we rejoice and go about our lives serving the One who gave His life for us and who calls us to love one another. AMEN