

Sermon Notes – November 6, 2022

“The Family of God”

(Mark 3:20-22, 31-35)

Our gospel lesson today is selected verses from chapter three of Mark’s gospel. I want you to know that this story is not recorded in Matthew or Luke’s gospels, and the only part that John mentions about Jesus’ family (where there is a riff between them) is when he says, “Jesus’ brothers did not believe in him at first.” So, John’s gospel only says that Jesus’ brothers did not believe in him. But, here in Mark’s gospel you read about a riff between Jesus and his family, and they think that he’s “out of his mind.” Please read the scripture...

This story comes early on in Jesus’ ministry. Jesus has been healing and teaching people; he’s called his twelve disciples. He and his disciples have wandered back down into Nazareth (his home town). His mother and his brothers find out that he’s going to be there in the synagogue speaking. Jesus has been in a house healing and teaching, and all of a sudden, his family is outside -- not only his family, but some of the Scribes and Pharisees from the temple in Jerusalem have come down to hear him. Now, these Scribes and Pharisees want to undermine Jesus because they feel like he’s misleading people; they accuse Jesus of healing people and casting out demons by the power of Satan, rather than God. Jesus told them that they were guilty of blasphemy -- anybody that blasphemes the Holy Spirit and says that the things of God are the things of the devil is blasphemy. And, so Jesus’ family has come down to get Jesus because they don’t know if he’s overwhelmed and tired. Is he “out of his mind”? Has he become a religious fanatic? Is he hanging around the wrong crowd because now he’s hanging with the despised tax collector, a former political zealot, and some uneducated fishermen that are misfits? He’s hanging around with all this other crowd and they’re not sure what is going on with Jesus. Jesus’ family thinks they need to protect him and provide for him. Maybe he’s not getting enough sleep or enough food - maybe he’s really undermining the Pharisees (even though it is them who are undermining him). They know that there is a ruckus going on and that’s going to look bad on them. (In those days, they didn’t act as an individual - they were part of a group, a family, and if your behavior was bad, it reflected back on your family.) So, Jesus’

behavior and that unwanted attention he was getting was bringing shame and embarrassment to his family, and they thought that they needed to protect him. When the friends come in and tell Jesus, “Listen, Master, your family’s out there. Your mother and your brothers are looking for you. They’re outside waiting on you.”

We don’t know if Jesus went outside and greeted them – all we know is that he looked at the crowd around him and he said, “Here’s my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God – whoever believes in Jesus and lives for him – they are my mother and my brothers and sisters. They are my family.” Why did he say that? *Was Jesus anti-family? ... No.* I venture to say that he probably talked to them after this, but we don’t really know. **I think Jesus seized this moment as a teachable moment-- to tell people that God has sent me to tell you that you have a larger family, the family of God -- You have a spiritual family.** This spiritual family is not bound by bloodlines, marriage connections, race, nationality, or any other boundaries. It’s anyone who belongs to Jesus Christ, identifies with him, claims him as Savior, and lives for him. You are a part of this larger family of God. Some of you say, “Well, Miss Peggy, I’ve got enough family. I don’t need any more family.” But, yes we do. If you have a close family, you’ve got a larger, spiritual family. If you have no family, little family, or your family has rejected you, it’s good news because you have a larger, spiritual family. Family are those people who are committed to us – people who love us, care for us, support us, and encourage us. **One of the things about your spiritual family is that they can challenge you and help you in ways that sometimes your biological family can’t or won’t. Sometimes, your spiritual family and you have longer lasting relationships.**

Any of you ever grow up in families where there was a riff -- maybe the siblings had rivalry, you thought mom or dad picked this sibling over you, maybe the family went through a divorce and you had to deal with those struggles, or maybe your dad lost his job and the family went through struggles? **All of our families are imperfect. And, I wonder if Mark didn’t include this story to remind us that no family is perfect?** Even Jesus’ family had some jealousy. Can’t you imagine those brothers when Jesus (at age 30) told them, “I’m going off because I’m called of God and I have to go claim the good news for all people.” They looked at him

like, “Are you crazy? Why are you leaving your mom? You are the first-born, the oldest child, Jesus. You’re supposed to take care of us and mom, and run dad’s carpentry shop! Why are you leaving us and being irresponsible?” Don’t you reckon there was some anger and bitterness at Jesus for taking off and leaving the family? Here he is looking like a religious fanatic or he’s coming off as “burned-out” or “out of his mind” and they just want to protect him and take care of him. And, Jesus said, “Here’s my family -- those who do the will of God.” You see, I don’t think that Jesus’ brothers understood who he was and what he was – the Son of God. I think Mary knew, but maybe she had forgotten, because do you remember that when Jesus was circumcised in the temple in Jerusalem, the old priest (Simeon) came to Mary and Joseph and said, “This son, this child, will cause the rising and falling of many in Israel. He will cause a sword to pierce your soul.” Maybe this was one of those times that pierced Mary’s soul – when Jesus didn’t come out and speak to her right then?

Jesus was not anti-family. He was trying to enlarge our definition of “family” -- that we have a spiritual family – the family of God. When we identify with Jesus and know him as Lord and Savior, and live for him, then we have a larger spiritual family. I think Mark included this riff with Jesus and his family to say: “No family is perfect – even Jesus’ family had problems.” **Number two: we have a larger, spiritual family. I think Mark went on to include this story because in the gospels, and in the book of Acts, we find out that Mary and Jesus’ brothers were at the appearance of Jesus after he had died and resurrected and appeared to the disciples, they were in the Upper Room with him when he appeared. When Jesus ascended to the Father after his resurrection, they were there with the disciples.** They had become believers in Jesus – in who he was and what he was about. The gospels tell us that James went on to become a leader at a church in Jerusalem and to write the book of James. Judas, his brother, went on to write the book of Jude in the New Testament. So, they didn’t believe in Jesus at first, but they later came to believe in Him and to serve God.

What is family to you and me – the family of God? What does that mean to us? I’m going to give you some ways that I see you being family of God to people in this church. Some of you remember Cole Reitzel

when he was young and as he's gotten older and you helped raise that child. I think if Greg and Carolyn were here and I said, "Does it take a village to raise a child?" - they'd say, "Yes!" This family at Trinity has been that village to help raise him. Some of you remember Chip Graves. There are many in this church that I could ask you, and say, "You helped sit with Chip Graves so his mother could worship God and have a break." You would read stories to him, do puzzles with him, talk with him, led him around the church, took him on tours, and did all kinds of things with him so his mother and his brother, Danny, could worship. You were being family to Chip and his family. I see you being family.

A few years ago, you did the Soup Kitchen to reach out to the homeless in this community -- all kinds of Sunday School classes, the choir groups, and different people in the church provided money, labor, or served in that Soup Kitchen. That's being the family of God - reaching out to people and caring.

I see you being the family of God -- when we used to do "Project In-as-much" and have 45-75 people on a Saturday helping to do mission work in this community. You worked cleaning gutters for some of the homebound; you did yard work for other people; you went to the nursing homes to visit; some of you even sewed and made things to take to people in the nursing home. You were out cleaning yards; you were out working at the Exodus House, ECCCM, the Corner Table, etc. You served together; you ate together; you prayed together and you worked together. That's being the family of God.

I saw you being the family of God two weeks ago when we did the Fall Festival. We probably had 50 members in this church involved in doing the Fall Festival - either serving hot dogs, doing car trunks, visiting, eating and serving, donating cash and candy and cakes, etc. You were there as the family of God - caring and reaching out to the community - not just our church, but the community. I also see you reaching out to help people when they're going through a crisis. Some of you in this church have had cancer and you know what it's like to go through cancer treatments, and you've walked alongside other people in this church who are going through their treatments. Some of you have been through open-heart surgery and you are walking with other people going through open-heart surgery. Some of you have been there to walk through grief

with other people - to carry them and to be their strength when they were weak.

God has called us to be the family of God - those who are committed to love, care, pray for, support, and challenge. You and I can challenge some people to grow in a way that their own family can't, and you will be there when they need you. I commend you for that. God has called us to be the family of God that cares about the young and the old. One of the things that I see that we need to do more of is to get back to some of those activities that we used to do - like Project In-as-much, mission trips for youth and adults, activities for the young and the old. We need to get back to more of those so that we feel that family connection.

You are the family of God. You have been that to me. When I lost my brother to Lou Gehrig's Disease, you were there for me -- you sent cards; you called; you prayed for me; you came to the funeral and you sent flowers. Thank you for being family to me. When I had COVID a couple of years ago, you brought paper products and left them at the door; you left me food at the door; you called and sent cards. You were being family to me because I don't have family here. Thank you for being the family of God.

Today, I've asked two people to just take a moment and share what the family of God means to them and how this church has been family to them. Deb Hill, would you come first - and I'll ask Megan Jorgensen to come next?

Deb Hill: I hope Rev. Peggy didn't bring her stop watch. She told me I could have 30 seconds to a minute. This church has meant so much to me and my family. I grew up in a very large family and most of them are gone. I came to Hickory in 2006 and it was just me. A few months later, my sister and nephew joined me. Now, one of my brothers lives here, also - the others are gone. This church, especially in the last two years, has reached out. My sister has had cancer; she's had major stomach problems and there's not a day that goes by that somebody at this church doesn't ask how she is or sends a card. When you come into the church, people speak to you and it's not just a, "Hey" - it's more in-depth. They want to know how you are - how your family is. This church means the world to me. People step up when they are asked. We all know that right now we

don't have someone in the nursery, and I noticed this morning that Addyson has already stepped-up and taken some kids to the nursery. When I called and asked if she'd do it the first night, she did. This church belongs to each other and we do care about each other. I appreciate it.

Megan Jorgensen: This church, like Miss Peggy said, the outreach is absolutely amazing. When Owen had his surgery, I had a ton of people calling me every day to check on him. Ever since my dad got diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's, he's had a really rough time adjusting to not having a job and stuff, and everybody is constantly asking how my dad is and how things are going. What can we do to make him feel better? That really means a lot to our family. We have six generations of family members that have gone to this church, including my own children. I grew up here. This church raised me just like Miss Peggy said for Cole. A lot of us were raised here. We've all had times to Alcolyte, have gone through youth group, kids club, and so many activities and fun things to do. I feel like when you really need it, this church is there for you. My husband and I were just talking the other day about teaching Hunter how to be a good person and not be so greedy. I said, "That's what church did for me." I was raised here and we were taught to be good people because we came to church and we did good things for people that needed it - like Project In-as-much, six mission trips, outreach with the youth group, etc. This church is a really friendly, loving place to be and a really great place to grow up. I am very glad to have a place to raise my kids.

We are the family of God and I want to remind you that you have a larger family than your own biological family. You have the Trinity Church family with you. I know that each of us has a story to share of what the family of God means to us and what this church means to us. You have that family just because of your relationship to Jesus Christ and the larger church body of God. I hope that we will continue growing in how to be that family to one another, and if you haven't experienced that, I pray that you'll help us to know how to be better family - committed to you, loving you, praying for you, supporting you, encouraging you. May we go to be the family of God. Amen.