

Jesus Chooses Love Over Rules

Mark 3:20-35

Rev Jeff Crews, June 10, 2018, First Congregational Church Brainerd

Nestled here on the calendar between Mother's Day and Father's Day we have this amazing scripture from Mark's Gospel about conflict in Jesus' family. Here, Jesus turns away from his own family and calls his followers his **real** sisters and brothers. What is going on in this strange passage? Why is Jesus ignoring the 5th Commandment to honor his mother? Doesn't Jesus know there are rules that must be followed?

Let's join in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to help us untangle this scripture. Will you pray with me? "Dear God of every family, be with us as we study Mark's Gospel and Jesus' family. Help us see Jesus' life as a template for our living, as we hear his Good News of your love. Amen."

At the end of our passage today Jesus turns away from his family, but he has a very good reason! There is a shocking clue why he does this in the first verses of our scripture today. Did you catch it? Verse 21 says, "When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.'" What? Jesus' Mom and family thought Jesus was crazy? And they went to restrain and silence him? The Greek here is very clear. Jesus' family wanted to bind him and keep him from talking and take him away. He was embarrassing them!

People were talking! They wanted Jesus to shut up! Sounds like a pretty tense family conflict to me.

So **Jesus** had family arguments? Anyone here ever have a family argument? [raise hand] Wow? So Jesus wasn't the only one who struggled with family conflict. It is part of being human, isn't it? But this passage also shows us how to **handle** family conflict. And you will be surprised how Jesus does this. So now while Jesus is teaching and healing, the crowds around him are huge. They are pressing him so much that Jesus has to run away—but the crowds keep finding him. They want to be cured! They want to see the spectacle of healing! But this is not just about the crowds in this story. **This is about us.** We want to be healed. We want to see the circus. Have you ever seen what happens when there is an accident on the road? People slow WAY down to SEE the spectacle. The crowds that Jesus struggles with **are us**, clamoring to be healed and cured and...loved. The crowds were so huge Jesus had to keep moving, but he never turned the crowds away. He kept preaching the good news that God loves all of us. He did not even have time to eat, but he kept preaching the good news that God loves all of us! **God loves all of us!**

It makes me very sad to realize that Jesus did not even have a

supportive family. Life was hard enough for Jesus- he didn't even have a home, but then we find out even his family did not support him. But that is how things work sometimes—good people with bad families. So now, at the end of our passage, Jesus' family shows up in this huge crowd and asks for Jesus. Now folks, Jesus knows what is going on. He is not foolish. His family wants to shut him up. And Jesus' response to his family conflict bears some careful study, because even though his response was simple, it was so very wise. Jesus' response to his family teaches us about how we should deal with conflict in our own family.

Let us look carefully at how Jesus responds in verse 33, Jesus says, "Who are my mother and my brothers? And looking around at those who sat around him he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! **Whoever does the will of God** is my brother and sister and mother.'" **Whoever does the will of God** is my brother and sister and mother!

This is how Jesus solves his family crisis. He defers to God's will. He redefines family. But notice what Jesus does **not** do. He does **not** do what his family wanted him to do. They wanted his silence, and that was not God's will. He doesn't bad mouth his family. Or call them names. Notice he does **not** argue with them. He ignores them because they are hurtful and toxic. Instead, Jesus opens up a wider view of

family. He opens the concept of who is in: people **who do God's will are his family**. Those who don't do God's will are not his family. Again, note he does **not** say those who **follow the religious law** are in. That is what the Jewish leaders had taught for thousands of years. He does not care what people say. He cares how people LIVE. He says people who **live their lives following God's will are his family**. OK. So now the question becomes how do we **live God's will**?

Jesus' entire life and ministry focuses on answering this simple question. We do **not** do God's will by following the law or the rules. We are not doing God's will by putting the Ten Commandments on the Courthouse wall. Instead, we are told by Jesus to place the **Beatitudes of love and mercy on our hearts**. The Pharisees followed the law exactly, and yet, they disregarded the first commandment to love the Lord their God with all of their mind and heart and soul, and to love the widow and orphan. Jesus taught that trying to keep the law condemned humankind, because NO ONE can follow the law perfectly. But Jesus came to **fulfill the law through love**. Love God. Love one another. **By loving God and each other we also fulfill the law just like Jesus did.** The law tried to focus humankind to live right, but notice that following the rules does not bring compassion or loving-kindness to your soul—

following the rules is **NOT** following God's will! Now I want you to think for a moment what this means for us to be in Christ's family and Christian. Jesus teaches right here that being a Christian is **not** believing a certain set of rules. Some fundamentalist or evangelical Christians will say that if you believe in Jesus that makes you a Christian. Jesus says something very different here. He says it is **not** following the rules-- but **how you live your life that makes you a Christian**. Here is what Jesus says throughout his ministry:

- You will know Christians by their fruits of love
- Do unto others as you wish to be done to you
- Do you love me? Jesus says. Then tend my sheep.
- Do it to the least among you, and you do it to me.
- Care for each other. Wash one another's feet.
- I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

If someone tells you they are a Christian but they do not treat those around them with mercy and loving kindness, Jesus says they are NOT in God's family. If someone tells you they are Christian but they lie or cheat or steal rather than treat one another with grace and compassion, Jesus says they are NOT in God's family. If someone tells you they are Christian but they are unkind to an immigrant or stranger, they are NOT in God's family. Here, at the very center of Jesus' teachings

about **family** we find the core of Jesus' teaching about **life**. We are not Christian by what we say or believe. Instead, we are Christian based on **what we DO and how we live!** And what should we do? Here Jesus says **Do God's will**: Love God and love one another. THAT is doing God's will—living our lives by living love for God and one another.

So what would this look like in real life? How do we SHOW God's love to the world? I found this beautiful example from a church in Brainerd, Minnesota: First Congregational Church of Brainerd. You may know of it. I know this church understands this teaching of Jesus, because they declare in their Open and Affirming Statement this expression of **living out the will of God**:

“As a congregation we seek to know and **share** God's love within us. We believe that each of us has a right and a responsibility to seek our own spirit-guided understanding of the holy scriptures. We acknowledge that our understandings are incomplete. We respect those whose prayerful consideration of scripture and tradition led them to conclusions other than those in this declaration. We trust, by grace, God grants us all a growing understanding of God's universal truth. Despite our differences, we affirm the Good News proclaimed by Jesus Christ, that God's love is an inclusive love for all creation and all people.”

Yes! This is the Good News! God loves us. **God loves us all!** God loves even family we don't agree with! Thanks be to God. Amen.