

Seeing God, Missing God Message for June 7th, 15. *Based on Mark 3: 20-35*

Loving and Gracious Lord: Open our eyes to see you, our ears to hear you, our hearts to know you and our minds to understand you.

Today's scripture reading from Mark's gospel is a really interesting one. It's full of name calling, accusations of literally being in league with the devil, and an apparent disowning of family members! This was not one of Jesus' better days!

So Jesus has come home, after having been round the countryside, the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum, stops in villages along the way, back to Capernaum and finally home. He's been choosing disciples, preaching and teaching, exorcising demons, forgiving some people of their sins and healing others. And his reputation has grown to the point where people follow him everywhere, he has so many demands on his time that he doesn't even have time to eat, so demanding was the crowd had gathered at his doorstep. And he's being harassed too!

Must have been quite a commotion, because even Jesus' family comes out of the house and gets involved. Jesus is in conflict with the religious authorities, this is getting pretty serious. In fact so serious that Jesus' family try to grab hold of him and restrain him. It was being said that he was 'out of his mind'. Wow, Mark's not pulling any punches, no politically correct language here: like he's just mis-guided, or unique or different. Nope, Mark flat out says they thought Jesus was crazy. So very different and so contrary to the traditional way of living, his behaviour so "abnormal" they thought he was loony tunes. Only Mark's gospel describes this event. Matthew and Luke, for whatever reason, don't add it to their accounts of Jesus life. They write about the rest of the story, each in their own context, but omit the accusations of craziness and the involvement of his family members actually trying to restrain him. They too must have thought he was "outside of himself" which is how the Greek words directly translates into English. Or maybe his family was concerned that he was in a potentially dangerous situation, or they were feeling protective of him, or maybe they were trying "to get him under control, if not out of fear for his life, at least to remove their own embarrassment because of the rising public" scene.¹

Jesus was thought to be crazy, what with all the many healings, and you know, the commanding of demons and evil spirits to come out of people. And then there was that time when he brought Simon's mother in law back from the brink of death. He'd been seen eating with sinners, hanging out with the less than the socially acceptable –the unclean-- and forgiving their sins to boot! He'd countered the Jewish laws about the Sabbath – he actually told the synagogue leaders that the Sabbath was made for people not people for the Sabbath! Imagine the nerve! Jesus challenged their thinking and their laws, the very essence of what they did and why and how they did it. He was turning their world upside down! All this in just the first 3 chapters of Mark! What Jesus was doing was strange, unusual, different, never done before, beyond the pale. He literally lived and worked on the 'wrong side of the tracks', and welcomed and encouraged "those people" to come to him, definitely living and encouraging others to live to the beat of a different drum, his drum.

Word of this upstart and his ways had come to the knowledge of the religious authorities, so they felt it necessary to come down from Jerusalem and put a stop to this fellow. This would be rather like if Bishops Bob and Terry and some of the professors and the Dean from the seminary of Huron University College coming to confront a priest in the rectory. The religious authorities were so threatened by Jesus' words and deeds that as far as they were concerned, there was only 1 explanation -- "He's possessed by Satan, the prince of demons, that's where he gets his powers." (*Mk 3: 22 nlt*)

¹ Don Saliers: Pastoral Perspective on Mark 3: 20-35 in Feasting on the Word Year B Vol. 3, p 116,

Why possessed by Satan? Because they couldn't possibly believe Jesus had the power of God. Why not? Because he wasn't doing things their way! And they were the teachers, the authorities on God and how to do things the way God wanted things done, and to whom and with whom. They knew what was the right way, and their way was God's way. Jesus was not adhering to the traditions, to the way it was always done, he was doing things differently, his teachings were different and it was as if he was flaunting it in their faces. This new way was disrupting the status quo. They were so concerned for maintaining the traditions and their place in it, maintaining the propriety of society, they couldn't see that the Spirit of God was in their midst. Not only couldn't they see the Spirit working in Jesus, they actually spoke against it, calling it Satan.

That is the blasphemy that Mark has Jesus is decrying, the denying of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' works, and in this story, in Jesus himself. Is this really unforgiveable as Mark so blatantly states? Mark truly seems to think so. I have to admit, I question that—would Jesus not even forgive his own family members, as they too may well have thought him possessed? I have to agree with one of the commentators I follow, this is more like “the portrait of a soul truly lost”—one desperately in need of knowing the true love of Christ². No one is irredeemable, unless they truly choose to be. And judgement, well, that's God's job. Ours is to be faithful, and love our neighbour and help bring them to faith, and to follow Jesus in all that we do.

So for the religious authorities who refused to see or acknowledge God's Spirit in Jesus, the only explanation could be the power of Beelzebub—Satan—the prince of darkness. Jesus quickly counters that argument, saying the power of evil cannot be used against its own self, it would just kill itself. Even Satan wouldn't do that to himself. In fact it was Jesus who had bound up Satan—remember the story of the 40 days in the desert? Jesus overcame Satan's powers. Interesting that when he exorcised the demons that controlled people, the demons themselves recognized who Jesus was – yet the religious authorities couldn't see it!

But still, for the argument to be made, Jesus must have been spouting off some pretty shocking viewpoints. Jesus over and over again presented a radical view of living that was contrary to the ways of the letter of the law-abiding Jewish society of the day, where adhering to the law was more important than caring about the people. When people's core values and beliefs are challenged, and they feel threatened, well—it can get pretty uncomfortable and pretty heated! Jesus was creating quite a scene, much to the distress of his family! It seems the kingdom of God just doesn't always fit society's definitions or categories.

Let's face it, Jesus was a social misfit. I have absolutely no doubt that his family were convinced that they were doing the right thing by restraining him and maybe even questioned his sanity too. But at this point in the story, his family just didn't get it either, just didn't understand where Jesus was coming from. Yes he was different, radically different, and he was proposing a way of life that was not in keeping with societal norms. When Jesus is told his mother and brothers are calling him, he responds who are my mother and my brothers? Instead he calls the crowd around him, the ‘flotsam and motsam’ of society that followed him, his family. Was Jesus denouncing his connection or divorcing to his family? I don't think Jesus was denying his blood relationship to his family. Recall, when he was hanging on the cross he actually gave the care of his mother to the disciple John. This statement is another example of hyperbole, Jesus talking in extremes to make a point. I think it was more like Jesus extending the definition of family, being more inclusive, rather than exclusive. He wasn't divorcing his family; he was denouncing the forces of opposition that he also saw in them.

So who then is Jesus family? Mark tells us, verse 35 “whoever does the will of God”. Now, that's a broad definition. For Jesus, family are all those who believe in God and do God's will—so essentially anyone can be part of Jesus' family. All of humanity could join, anyone, even the social misfits—maybe especially the misfits, the social outcasts. That is who

² *working preacher.org* podcast for the 2nd Sunday of Pentecost 2015

Jesus came to be with, those who were on the margins of society, those who knew they needed to be saved. Even Jesus' definition of family is upside down. No wonder the religious authorities want to declare him insane! He's challenging their control of society.

This has led me to ponder about how we recognize God's work, God's movement in our midst? Do we become so engrossed in the propriety, the social mores, how things are supposed to be done, how we've always done them, get so busy with the details and the business of being and doing "church" that we miss seeing Jesus in others? Do we too avoid the movement of the Spirit in our midst? Do we become too exclusive, too exclusionary and close minded, in our thinking that we've don't see where God could be in a new idea or concept? Are we really open to accepting and welcoming all who come in our doors, or do we unconsciously pressure them to fit in to how we do things. Are we open to considering a new and different way of doing a long held tradition, because we don't like change? And in the process do we miss or suppress Holy Spirit's presence? Food for thought and prayer.

And now, let me close this homily time as I opened it:

Loving and Gracious Lord: Open our eyes to see you, our ears to hear you, our hearts to know you and our minds to understand you. Amen

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