



PONDERING A  
TREASURE

3<sup>RD</sup> WEEK OF  
ADVENT

SERMON SCRIPTURE TEXT

# MARK 3:20-35

<sup>20</sup> Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. <sup>21</sup> And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”

<sup>22</sup> And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” <sup>23</sup> And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. <sup>27</sup> But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

<sup>28</sup> “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— <sup>30</sup> for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

<sup>31</sup> And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” <sup>33</sup> And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” <sup>34</sup> And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” <sup>35</sup> For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

<sup>25</sup> but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

<sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!”

<sup>27</sup> Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

# DAY 1

MARK 10:29-30

<sup>29</sup> Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, <sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”

One prominent New Testament scholar calls this Mark 10 passage along with Mark 3:34-35 “deeply shocking” because Jesus elevates the importance of his newly created family over that of traditional family bonds. He does this in a context where family is clearly central to God’s plan for all of humankind. We see this beginning in Genesis 1:27-28 and throughout all of Scripture. The story of the nation of Israel is that of the family of God. God’s promises are to the nation/families. From Abraham up until Christ, the family and Jewish nation were one and the same. Then in the Gospel narratives, we see Jesus completely changing and expanding the idea of family. No longer was the primary criteria for family one’s blood lines. To be a part of this expanded family, the primary criteria is that we must be willing to be obedient and do the will of God above all else.

Genetic heritage was still important for sure, and caring for one’s traditional family is basic godly behavior, but the new family that Jesus created supersedes bloodlines. The gospel redefines family.

How is this idea true? Why is this new family definition so important? What should it mean for followers of Jesus?

- We have a new unity in Christ that pulls us together in that new family. Christ’s life and teaching totally redefines how we are to relate to everyone.
- We have a new identity together as a company of the forgiven and committed. This identity produces a bond that raises us above all circumstances.
- We have the firm confidence that God put it together and that he promises to maintain it going forward into glory.
- This new family has been given the gifts of the Spirit to shape our lives together.
- There is no limit to the resources we have together in Christ.
- God’s family gives us leadership that helps to direct us all on a path of obedience that leads to God’s will happening in our lives.
- We have a higher purpose together—building up the body of Christ.
- In this new family, we have a collective hope for the future brought about by Jesus’s death and resurrection. There is no question about where it will all end.

# PRAYER

*Lord, while this teaching is shocking, it is also comforting and challenging. Thank you for all that is good about the way you have designed this expanded family. Expand our understanding of family in your plan for our lives and the church as we interact with Scripture. Help us to be those obedient family members that seek daily to do your will.*

~ Richard Malone

# DAY 2

PROVERBS 1:7-9

<sup>7</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

<sup>8</sup> Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, <sup>9</sup> for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

When Jesus redefines family for us in Mark 3 and 10 (and other places), one of the natural questions we want to ask is, "What about my family of origin?" It's a valid question, because it can seem like Jesus is saying that our human families don't matter. We must remember that although Jesus re-ordered our families, putting the family of God above our family of origin, he did not do away with our earthly family. Of course, there are times when the family of God and our earthly family members intersect. Praise the Lord! When this happens, the impact on discipleship for family members can be profound.

I think of Mary's story, one that will be dealt with in a few days in this devotion series. Without saying too much, Mary was deeply impacted by the fact that Jesus, her son, was the Messiah. This had a particular impact on her and Jesus's brothers and sisters. For they went from being skeptical of Jesus to sitting at the table after his ascension with the other disciples (see Acts 1:14). It's an amazing discipleship story in and of itself. Jesus's statement to Mary and the disciple that he loved in John 19:26-27 gives us a glimpse at the way Jesus saw his family.

Proverbs is also full of the ways in which family members can disciple one another. Proverbs 1:7-9 draws attention to a son's listening to his father's instructions and his mothers' teachings because they are "a graceful garland" and "pendants," referring to instruction in the home. The Shema, found in Deuteronomy 6, was recited and memorized by families as a way of teaching about the character of YHWH, the God they so closely aligned their lives around. This teaching was to be passed down to their children:

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. *You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.*"

There was an emphasis on reciting and living out these words in the home because they understood the impact family could have in discipleship. It's a profound reality, and a wonderful gift.

We have to acknowledge that this isn't everyone's story. Some of us didn't experience intentional discipleship in the home. Some of us may even have had the opposite experience, maybe abuse, neglect, or ambivalence to Jesus altogether. The truths of the gospel weren't taught to us or even talked about in our homes. Yet this is what makes yesterday's devotion so much more powerful. Jesus has expanded the family of God. He has completed what God intended from the beginning—a people, a family that is made up of nations. Praise be to God!

## PRAYER

*Father, thank you for giving us our families. We thank you even amidst their brokenness and difficulty. We know that you are pleased to work through so many different means, including family, whether that be our family of origin or the family of God. Jesus binds us in ways we could never dream of, making the stranger a brother and the outcast a sister. Would you continue to work through those means that we might come to a better understanding of your grace in our lives? In Jesus' name. Amen.*

~ Addison Hawkins

# DAY 3

MARK 3:20-21, 31-32

<sup>20</sup> Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. <sup>21</sup> And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”

<sup>31</sup> And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.”

Families are complex and Jesus’s family was no different. Jesus had returned home in the midst of crowds. Some were cheering him on, marveled by the miracles he was doing, while the religious leaders were conspiring to take him down. We don’t know much about Jesus’s life before his ministry began, but I don’t imagine it was filled with the chaos they saw when he returned home. In response, they tried to seize him because they believed he was out of his mind. We don’t know exactly what their rationale was. Were they afraid for him or afraid for their own reputations? What we do know is that they didn’t understand or necessarily believe in his mission at this point, and, as a result, they were trying to put an end to what he was trying to do. In fact, John 7:5 tells us that his brothers did not believe in him.

One interesting thing about this narrative is that the opposition of the scribes is placed in the midst of it. In 3:22-30, the scribes accuse Jesus of having an unclean spirit and being in league with the demons. But Jesus turns this around on them and subtly accuses them of acting against the Holy Spirit in their opposition to him. There is a parallel between the two stories:

For they were saying, “He is out of his mind.” (21b)  
For they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.” (30)

Both his family and the scribes made accusations against Jesus and tried to hinder his ministry. By acting against him, they were not identifying with him. So Jesus establishes and identifies a new family: “For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” (v. 35).

However, this is not the end of the story because Jesus’s mother and brothers came to identify with him. “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:14).

They were all there at the beginning of the church doing the will of God and continuing the work of their brother. Scripture and tradition tell us that his brothers would become important leaders in the church, even dying for the faith.

## PRAYER

*From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.  
The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the Lord!  
May your hearts live forever!  
All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before you.  
For kingship belongs to the Lord,  
and he rules over the nations.*

Psalm 22:25-28

~Jerry Stutzman



# DAY 4

MARK 3:33-35

<sup>33</sup> And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?”

<sup>34</sup> And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

LUKE 8:19-21

<sup>19</sup> Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. <sup>20</sup> And he was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.” <sup>21</sup> But he answered them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

We have been focusing this week on the new definition of family in God’s kingdom through an interaction Jesus had with his earthly family. This encounter may trigger our memory of other times when Jesus’s response to people leaves us a little perplexed. Imagine asking an invalid crippled for 38 years if he wanted to be healed! Imagine telling a desperate Gentile mother seeking help for her demon-possessed daughter that it would not be right to throw children’s bread to the dogs! And when Nicodemus politely affirmed Jesus as a teacher from God, Jesus told him that unless he was born again, he could not even see the kingdom of God, let alone enter it. To our ears, Jesus sounds abrupt and insensitive.

I have learned that starting with Jesus’s answer and working back to the question or circumstance helps me understand the true issue. Jesus was always testing hearts. He knew the essential issue is hardly ever what we think it is. He knew how often we say everything about nothing, and nothing about everything, and he is never willing to spend time building on a false foundation.

The context of Jesus’s new definition was his family coming to rescue him from himself. They were hearing wild stories of healings that drew such pressing crowds that Jesus could not even eat. What could a respectable family do but rescue him from such madness? Mark inserts a paragraph into this drama describing how the religious leaders who came from Jerusalem to check on this were accusing Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan, hinting that Jesus’s brothers were much closer to thinking like the scribes than the believing listeners.

It was a moment of truth! Jesus saw an opportunity to open blind eyes and deaf ears to who he was and why he had come. Looking at the eager faces before him, he said these shocking words: they were his true family because they heard his word with the intention of obeying it!

Jesus came from heaven. He left his family there to honor his Father's desire to bring many sons and daughters to glory. He did not come to make bad people good, or good people a little better. He was not interested in creating a mutual admiration society of individuals cheerful enough and busy enough to avoid facing God. He came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8b). He came to deliver his hostages from death (Heb. 2:15). This required going back to the diseased root, cutting it off, and beginning again—a new humanity, a new family tree that would include individuals of every age, gender, and ethnicity. In fact, Jesus's human ancestry prefigures the church.

God continues to gather his family 2,000 years after Jesus spoke these words. He invites us and commissions us to join him in his work of gathering his family from every tribe and nation. As one family of believers at Christ Church, we have many opportunities to support and encourage our friends who have gone around the world to increase and build God's family. Again this Christmas, we can contribute to various ministries at work in God's big family. And we can have new eyes to see one another as Jesus saw those who were hearing and following him. We can care about people far away, but we can know the people we see week by week. God created families as a place where we are accepted and loved, where we share joys, sorrows, and responsibilities. There is no greater privilege than to be part of the family of God!

## PRAYER

*Gracious Father, what love you have shown us in calling us your children! Thank you, Jesus, for coming and claiming us! Help us finish the work you gave us to do. Open our eyes to see and love our brothers and sisters far away and here at Christ Church. And we are looking forward to the happy family reunion someday when you have gathered all your family in our home of righteousness where Jesus will have his place. We will worship and celebrate! Amen*

~ Judy Vander Ark

# DAY 5

JOHN 19:25-27

<sup>25</sup> but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

We have been looking this week at how the work of Jesus transforms our understanding of family. It is instructive that right until the very end of his earthly life, Jesus continues to press home these truths. Even from the cross, Jesus continues to broaden our horizons. I wrote about this in our *Pondering the Life of Jesus with Mary* book:

*Here on the cross, Jesus takes two people that are precious to him, two people that are really central to the followers of Jesus in those days, and reminds them of what family looks like to God. The family we're born into or adopted into is important, but even more important is the fact that if we belong to God we are family to one another.*

*This was so important for the men and women, boys and girls who followed Jesus in the days, months, and years after his death and resurrection. They faced some really difficult trials, but they had strength and hope because Jesus helped them see that they had each other, that they were family. The same thing is true for us today. If we belong to Jesus, we belong to the family of God. We have mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers not only by blood relation, but also because we belong to God's family.*

Like all of us, Mary experienced grief and loss. She wrestled with questions about what God was doing in the world and in her life. She, along with the rest of the disciples, would face persecution in the face of carrying out their mission to bring the good news of Christ to the world. It doesn't matter if it is the 1st century or the 21st century, the challenges that Jesus's followers face are of the same sort. So too are the resources that God gives his people. Jesus promises that he will never leave us or forsake us. Individually and collectively, we have Christ in us through the gift of the Spirit. In addition, very tangibly, he gives us to one another. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, daughters, and sons we find ourselves in a large family with hearts and hands to love one another. Life is hard, but we don't have to go it alone.

# PRAYER

*Jesus, thank you that even from the cross you could see through to our ongoing need for the family of God to care for one another. None of us are immune from needing this care, whether relationally, materially, or spiritually. And all of us, in Christ, are equipped to support our family members in time of need. As Mary learned these lessons and grew in understanding throughout her journey of discipleship, may we too. In Jesus's precious name, we pray. Amen.*

~ Andrew VanderMaas