

Text – Mark 3:20-35 Theme: “Jesus’ Friends and Foes”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It was the ancient Greek playwright, Aristophanes, who said, “It is from their foes, not their friends, that cities learn the lesson of building high walls.” Sun Tzu, the Chinese general and military strategist who lived six centuries before Christ, said, “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.”

Those are just two of many well-known quotes about friends and foes. Likely most of us have heard someone say, “With friends like that, who needs enemies?” But the truth is, our lists of friends and foes changes from time to time.

And at times, it may be hard to tell one from the other. In our text for today, we see friends, family and foes of Jesus. These groups share a misunderstanding of both Jesus’ identity and his mission. In this text, Jesus also points to another group: his “real” family.

After Jesus had chosen his disciples, as Mark reports earlier in this chapter, he went home to Galilee. His reputation followed him there, and soon the crowds gathered to hear him and to see the mighty things he was doing. Jesus’ family and friends had seen enough. They went out to “restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind’” (Mark 3:21).

This appears to be an intervention of sorts on the part of Jesus’ family and friends. You’ve likely heard about interventions. Someone is in trouble and can’t get out of it. Someone is out of control because of drugs or alcohol or some other addiction, so the family or friends, or both, step in to help them, even to pressure them to get help.

Jesus, they think, has gone out of his mind. Someone suggested this, and now they’re all buying into the idea. The crowds have gone to his head. A little fame has changed him, and he can’t stop pursuing it.

Or, as was often the case in Jesus’ day, anyone considered “out of his mind” was thought to be possessed by an evil spirit. If his friends and family thought that, then Jesus certainly needed to get out of the spotlight of the crowds and get some help.

Interestingly, though, if Jesus had really needed that kind of help, he himself was exactly the right person to go to, with a kind of “physician, heal thyself” request.

The family does not recognize that Jesus is doing the very thing he was sent to do: “... to bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free ...” (Luke 4:18).

So the family and friends wanted to step in, but the crowds were already there, and they could not get Jesus out of that situation.

Mark goes on to record that some religious authorities were also on the scene, scribes who had come from Jerusalem, and they said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons” (Mark 3:22).

They accused Jesus of being an ally of Satan! While they couldn’t deny what he had done in casting out demons, they could come up with an accusation to discredit him. They simply could not accept or acknowledge that Jesus’ power came from God. To do so would show them as impotent leaders who did not have that same power.

While sometimes Jesus didn’t answer his critics directly, here he tells them exactly why their accusations are bogus. “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand ....” (Mark 3:23b-24).

Jesus’ friends and family may have thought he was insane or delusional – out of his mind; Jesus’ foes thought he was evil. Realize what they said – that the Son of God was working for Satan.

It was this that prompted Jesus to talk about the unforgivable sin. “Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” (Mark 3:29).

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is not verbalizing certain words about the Holy Spirit.

Two things seem to be at work in what Jesus says about this “unforgivable sin.” First, it is clearly related to the accusations the scribes had made about him. To call him, in effect, the Son of Satan is blasphemy. He is the Son of God!

Secondly, this sin is a rejection of the source of salvation – God himself, through Jesus Christ. This is “unforgivable” in the same way it would be if you or I were on a sinking boat miles from shore, and rejected the opportunity to get into a lifeboat, thus rejecting the only source of our “salvation.”

Much more could be said about this “unforgivable sin,” but here the point is clear: Don’t call Jesus the evil one; he’s anything but that; he’s the Son of God! Secondly, don’t make the mistake of rejecting Jesus; he’s the source of eternal salvation

As our Gospel concludes, we hear the rest of the story about Jesus’ family. His family members finally get close enough to him to send word through the crowd that they want to see him. “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you,” members of the crowd tell him (Mark 3:32).

You’d think that Jesus – kind and compassionate and loving Jesus – would recognize his oversight of not including his family in the events of the day. Or that he would excuse himself to go see them. Or that he would send word back to them to reassure them of his sanity.

Instead, Jesus looks around at the people gathered around him and asks, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Looking again at those nearby, Jesus says, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:33-35).

Imagine the shock of the people who heard those words. How did his immediate family members react? Mark doesn't tell us, but perhaps Mary was reminded of the time when Jesus was 12 and remained in Jerusalem after the festival of the Passover.

When his family found him in the temple talking with the teachers, Jesus said, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know I must be in my Father's house?” (Luke 2:49). Luke tells us that Mary “treasured all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51). Maybe she was beginning to understand the incredible gift her son was to the world.

The people listening to Jesus were ... stunned? Perplexed? Wondering what this meant? Again, we don't know – but we do know that Mark, the evangelist, thought this whole exchange was important enough to include in his short gospel.

We can make the case that the purpose of the Gospel of Mark was to show the true identity of Jesus. The first half of Mark's gospel shows Jesus revealing himself to the world.

The second half shows Jesus focusing on the disciples after Peter's confession: “You are the Messiah” (Mark 8:29). As Mark takes us through Jesus' life and ministry to show us who Jesus is, one of the points Mark makes is that Jesus' real family members are those who do the will of God.

That's good news; that's great news for all of us! We do not have to trace our genealogy to see if we're part of Jesus' family. We are part of the family when we live our lives as followers of Jesus. And because of our salvation, we remain in the family of God by gratefully committing ourselves to doing God's will.

Consider your own family. Whether you were born into it, were adopted into it or married into it, you have a choice about how active to be in the family.

It's possible to just turn your back on the family and walk away. But generally, it's far better to gratefully embrace your family and do your part to make the family better. There can be great joy in being an active part of the family.

That's what Jesus is asking us to do. The apostle Paul tells us we are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). That is, we are sisters and brothers of Jesus. We are part of the family.

So the question for us today is this: How do we live our lives as members of Jesus' family doing the will of God?

That's a lifelong question. There's no way anyone can fully answer that for you. Each of us must search our hearts and the scriptures and listen for God's word to us about how best we can do this.

What I'm sure of today is this: Jesus has friends who misunderstand him. He has foes who fight against him. He has family on whom he relies to do his will. Friend, foe, or family – you decide. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.

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