

**Third Sunday After Pentecost**  
**Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish**  
**Saint Francisville, LA**  
**10 June 2018**

**Mark 3:20-35**

Have you ever had someone be embarrassed of you? It happened to me a few years back and it is an interesting experience. I flew to Georgia to do the baptism for one of my grand niece in a local Episcopal church. Once she saw me dressed in clergy outfits about to start the service, my niece realized that this was the first time ever she had seen me in a clergy role. She automatically became very nervous. A number of questions went through her mind, “What if I used her a sermon illustration? What if I told embarrassing stories about her or my family? What if I wasn’t a good preacher?” She was concerned about creating a bad impression with this new community she had just joined. Anyway, as the service began, her anxiety started increasing and it did not relent until I finished the service. At that point I swear I heard the loudest sigh of relief I had ever heard. I will apply this brief story to the Gospel a bit later on, but for now, let us get to it.

Jesus has harsh critics almost from the beginning of the Gospel of Mark. After the first chapter passes by without much controversy, we arrive at chapter two of Mark. In verse 7 the Scribes accuse him of blasphemy after Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic who was lowered from the roof of the house he is in. They say, “Why does this fellow speak this way. It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Then at verse 16, after Jesus calls Levvy, the Pharisees accuse him of eating with tax collectors and sinners. They ask, “Why?” to which Jesus responds, “I came not to seek the righteous, but sinners”. Then, at verse 18, people criticize Jesus because his disciples don’t fast like John’s disciples or the Pharisee’s disciples. They ask, “Why?” to which Jesus responds by using images from a wedding banquet, “They don’t need to fast while the groom is still with them”. Then on verse 24, once again the Pharisees are upset because Jesus’ disciples pick heads of grain as they walk by a field on the Sabbath. They ask “Why do they do what is not allowed under the law?” to which Jesus responds, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath”.

Jesus is criticized by the Scribes, the Pharisees, the Herodians, and even some anonymous “people” whose names or professions are not given to us by Mark. By the time chapter three begins, all of his enemies are watching Jesus very closely. Verse 3:2 says, “They watched him to see if he would cure a man

with a withered hand on the Sabbath, so they might accuse him". The opposition is becoming stronger. On verse 3:6, the "Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him". Then after more teaching and miracles, Jesus decided to go home, as verse 19 tells us. The episode today takes place in Jesus' home town. By then, news of his miracles and popularity had reached home. Of course, news of his critics, rumors about possible mental illness or demonic possession, and rumors about his behaviors had also reached home. There are many reasons for the family to be concerned.

The passage begins by telling us that the crowds had followed him from Jerusalem. In fact, there were so many of them pressing on Jesus and his disciples that they couldn't even eat. Then the passage tells us that Mary and the family heard some of the rumors (that he had lost his mind, or the he was demon-possessed). Mark tells us that they "went out to restrain him". It is easy to criticize Mary and the family for wanting to silence Jesus, but let's think a moment about what's happening here. For starters, Jesus is at home. Even though people of the day were used to itinerant preachers, who would pop in and out of the towns often, this is no regular itinerant preacher. They know this man. This is Jesus, the carpenter. He grew up in their fishing village. They remember his father, Joseph. They know and remember the quiet, young man, Jesus, working at the shop and helping his mother. They know the family doesn't come from wealth and influence and Jesus was not a Rabbinical student and had obtained no theological instruction other than what every body else got at the temple. To the people of the town, Jesus's words and works of wonder can only mean that he is either mentally ill or demon-possessed. In fact, some claim that it is by the power of the chief of demons that he is able to spell demons.

We tend to pass silent judgement on Mary and the rest of the family for not believing in Jesus enough. But, let me suggest that in this culture, the behavior of a member of any family brings shame or honor to the family. And in an honor and shame-based culture this is serious business. You don't associate with dishonored families. You avoid them in public places. You don't do business with them. This is so serious that it covers issues related to hospitality. The honor of the guest you invite to supper extends to the family. Likewise, the lack of honor guests covers the family. If the family is dishonored by this mentally-ill son, everyone will pay the consequences later. To have Jesus engaged in controversial teaching in the presence of these authority figures who followed him from Jerusalem has the potential to place the family in grave peril. They are concerned for his safety, but they are also concerned for the family's reputation and good name. The reasons for the attempt to rescue Jesus from a potentially embarrassing situation are concern for his wellbeing, perhaps embarrassment

and shame, concern for the good name of the family, and a desire to protect him from critics and enemies.

Imagine that you are having supper at home with the family, perhaps binging on Netflix, when you get news that your eldest son or daughter is dancing naked outside of the Magnolia restaurant, singing *Mary had a Little Lamb*, and inviting the locals to join her in the dance. People are beginning to gather to witness the event. Everybody knows who she is. They knew her as an acolyte at this church, as a promising student at the local schools, she even helped in the family business for years. What would you do? Would you get in your car and drive 100 miles an hour to go rescue your daughter or your Son? Would you call the family doctor to do a mental status examination? Would you call an ambulance and meet them there?

In either case, Mark does not give us the reasoning behind Mary and the family's actions. When they arrive to the place where Jesus is, there are so many people around Jesus that they can't get in. They have to send him a message that they are standing outside waiting and they want to see him. I believe Jesus knew why his family was there. He knew that whoever is not willing to forsake mother and father and siblings for the sake of the Gospel is not worthy of the Kingdom of God. He knows that nothing, even his mother's concerns, can stop him from fulfilling God's mission for him. He must preach the gospel even in the face of criticism and persecution. This is why he has come to earth. I believe it is for this reason that Jesus says, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Now, I don't believe Jesus is purposely trying to offend his mother, rather he is making a powerful point. Those who do the will of God can claim a relationship with Jesus which is as powerful and strong as the biological relationship of a mother and son. Those who accept his Gospel can consider themselves part of his family. They belong to him and he belongs to them. The paralytic whose sins were forgiven is now part of his family because he accepted Jesus in faith. Some of the tax collectors and sinners who ate with Jesus at Levvy's house are now part of his family because they realized their need for a Savior and they have come to believe Jesus is this Savior. The man with the withered hand, whom no one would even acknowledge on the Sabbath, has now become a part of Jesus' family because of the physical and spiritual healing he received as a gift from the Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus has come to earth to seek the sinners, the lost, those who don't belong, those forgotten even by their own families, those for whom society has no use. And when he finds them, Jesus heals them, restores them, and loves

them. But he goes beyond this, he also makes them his brothers and sisters and mothers. He brings them into a new family, giving them a new identity, a place to belong, and a new status as children of God. And the most wonderful thing about this is that nowhere in Mark do we read that the paralytic was a good man, that he deserved Jesus's compassion, that he was devout or righteous. Nowhere do we hear that the man with the withered hand was deserving of Jesus's love. In fact, we hear nothing of their moral character or the inner thoughts of their hearts. All we know is that they were desperate, they approached the source of all hope and life, they were healed and forgiven, and they were brought into a new family. Not because they deserved it, but because Jesus was compassionate towards them. Jesus accepted them and was not repelled by their sin. Jesus loved them and claimed them for himself, as members of God's own family. This is the Good News for us today.

My friends, this passage comforts me for several reasons. First, it tells me that those who engage in Christian Ministry should expect criticism and opposition. If it happened to Jesus, it will happen to you and to me. Some people will question our motives; some will misunderstand our actions; some will place unrealistic expectations on us, expectations that even Jesus would probably not be able (or would want) to fulfill. Yet, we must remain faithful to the mission entrusted to us by the Lord himself. God's Holy Spirit will give us the strength to withstand all this criticism and to learn from it.

Secondly, this passage comforts me because it reminds me of Jesus's great compassion and mercy. His acceptance of me is not dependent on my behavior, my righteousness, or the provenance of my family's last name. All I need to do to belong to his family is to acknowledge my desperate condition, to realize that Jesus is the answer to my problem, to welcome him into my heart, and to accept what he freely gives me. All I need to belong to his family is to accept his free gift of salvation. This brings me great comfort. We are his brothers and his sisters, we are children of God, we are special to him. Thanks be to God! Amen.