

**Scripture Lesson:** Mark 3:20-35

*Pew Bible N.T. pg. 35*

<sup>20</sup>Then Jesus went home, and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. <sup>21</sup>When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” <sup>22</sup>And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” <sup>23</sup>And he called them to him and spoke 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 his end has come. <sup>27</sup>But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered. <sup>28</sup>“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, <sup>29</sup>but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin”— <sup>30</sup>for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.” <sup>31</sup>Then his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup>A crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you.” <sup>33</sup>And Jesus replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” <sup>34</sup>And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup>Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Mark 3:20-35

06/09/2024 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

“Family Business”

Rev. Amy Terhune

I’d like to begin this morning with a 30-second clip from a 2003 comedy, starring Jackie Chan and Owen Wilson, entitle *Shanghai Knights*. [Show clip from *Shanghai Knights (2003)*, time 57:26-57:58.]

“John, what in our history together makes you think I’m capable of something like that?”

Translation: are you out of your mind? This is one of those priceless comedic moments where the use of parody allows the actors to poke fun at action adventures.

But when used in scripture, its neither parody nor comedy. Our scripture lesson for this morning shines a light on grievous moment in the early ministry of Jesus. Things are finally happening. In this chapter, Jesus heals a man with a withered hand, he calls his 12 disciples, and he gains popularity with the common people of his nation—people marginalized by infirmities and ailments, by birth defects and chronic disorders, by bad choices and poor options. Already, lives are being touched and changed. But Jesus gains his share of critics. After all, one cannot make a splash in public without attracting a fair share of critics, naysayers, and denigrators. That much hasn’t changed in 2000 years. As far as I can tell, the problem seems to be that Jesus just doesn’t fit the bill for a religious leader or prophet, and certainly not Messiah. God’s emissaries are big, loud, and scary, with smoke in their footsteps and lighting in their words. A Messiah crushes enemies, throws out opposing armies, and avoids “unclean” people. A Messiah does not notice or waste time on little people and messy problems. But Jesus does notice, and care, and raise up, doesn’t he? Which is what leads me to fall at his feet and call him “Savior”. But 2000 years ago, that kind of thing led folks to shake their heads and call him “crazy”.

One afternoon some 30 years ago or more, Jerry Coleman, the radio announcer for the San Diego Padres at the time, was calling the game, and fans listening to the baseball game on the radio heard Coleman say this: “Winfield goes back to the wall! He hits his head on the wall, and it rolls off! It’s rolling all the way back to second base! This is a terrible thing for the Padres!” [from *Norton’s Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes* by Robert J. Morgan (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000) pg. 573.]

That's what Jesus' family is hearing, too. He's lost his head. He's out of his mind. He's dealing with sick, the demon-possessed, the sinful. So they go to restrain him. Are they driven by embarrassment, or by fear, or by incredulity? I don't know for sure. Given that there were angels and shepherds and magi at his birth, you would think his mother would be expecting something like this. But while I can't be certain of the exact nature of his family's concerns, their presence serves to help us understand the significance of Jesus' growing ministry. This is not a flash in the pan. Jesus isn't just taking a little break to "find himself". This is a real movement, making real waves in the social fabric of the community, making a real difference in the lives of questionable people. The original Greek of this passage indicates that his family has come to take him by force. They're genuinely concerned.

And I suppose they have good reason to be, especially when they hear that some scribes have traveled all the way from Jerusalem to see their Jesus. They say he's more than crazy—they say he's evil. "See, they cannot deny what Jesus is doing; too many people have experienced it, too many people have been helped. So their strategy is to turn the people against Jesus by saying that he's ministering by the power of an evil spirit." [from Grant Gunnink, *The Unforgivable Sin*, illustrations on Mark 3:20-35, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).] It takes a demon to know a demon, or so they say.

But of course, it's a ridiculous charge, and Jesus says as much. "Think of it this way," he suggests... "If I'm on the side of evil, then the house of evil is collapsing, because I would be working against my own house. And if I'm on the side of God, then I would naturally work against the house of evil." In other words, Jesus says in effect, "Decide what you want about my ministry; decide whether or not you think I am out of my mind. But either way, know this: the end of evil is already in sight. [from "Looking A Little Bit Crazy" by William G. Carter, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

That's sounds like Jesus we know, doesn't it? He bests his opponents in the game of logic. He offers a word of hope in dark and troubling times. Would that he had stopped there! But he doesn't. "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin."

Never have forgiveness? Eternal sin? That does not sound like the Jesus we know. But lest you begin to feel anxious and question the primacy of grace, let me hasten to assure you that there are no sins God cannot forgive. God's grace, God's unmerited and undeserved forgiveness is promised to all who believe in Jesus. The scriptures are clear on that. Rather, Jesus is addressing a human attitude evidenced in the scribes that come to criticize him. David G. Rogne calls that human attitude "spiritual atrophy", and he offers the following example:

"In Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, the waters in the farthest recesses of the cave are completely dark. The fish that swim there are blind. The structure of their eyes is intact, but the optic nerve has atrophied. They have eyes but cannot see. If they were to swim out into the sunlight, they could not tell the difference between that and midnight. Jesus was suggesting that if a people shut their eyes and ears to goodness long enough, they eventually come to the place where they can no longer tell the difference between good and evil. They have extinguished the light that is within them. Any unbiased person would have seen Jesus acts of healing as good, but the vision of the religious authorities was so distorted by anger, fear, and hatred that instead of being moved by them, they called these good works evil. The sin against the Holy Spirit, about which Jesus spoke, is the act of so consistently refusing to see God at work in the world that, eventually, God's work can no longer be recognized, even when it is fully displayed. The situation is not unforgivable because God refuses to forgive it. I'll say it again as clearly as I can: There is no sin beyond God's redeeming. You can't put a limit on God. But if we get ourselves into a place where we can't acknowledge sin, where we can't face the possibility that we might have things wrong, where we're not open – we cut ourselves off from the flow of God's grace.

“Jesus’ words, for one thing then, hold out a warning—when the actions of another make us feel jealous, fearful, threatened, or angry, it behooves to honestly examine what is happening inside of ourselves before we ascribe evil motives to the actions of others. [2 ¶s adapted from “Is Anything Unforgivable?” by David G. Rogne, www.Sermons.com.]

For Jesus, this is all about an open channel. Too many people stop their ears up. They don’t want to hear anything different. I love the story about the man who bought a new radio, brought it home, placed it on the refrigerator, plugged it in, turned it to WSM in Nashville (home of the Grand Ole Opry), and then pulled all the knobs off! He had already tuned in all he ever wanted or expected to hear. [from Grady Nutt, in *Homemade*, July, 1990.] Now that’s just plain crazy.

“...But there is also a positive message to be learned from these words. The lesson is that we must keep ourselves alert and tuned to the way God is working in the world. Remember that those who were seeking to discredit Jesus were religious people. Their problem was that they just didn’t expect God to be acting as Jesus said he was acting, so they missed the movement of God in their midst... Today God may be speaking to us in causes that are unpopular, or in political events that cause us to feel threatened and insecure. The cries for justice and fairness in the world may come from quarters that we are not accustomed to listening to. We need to exercise diligence so that we don’t miss the voice of God today just because it happens to be spoken by unfamiliar lips. [adapted from “Is Anything Unforgivable?” by David G. Rogne, www.Sermons.com.]

It’s all about what you train yourself to hear. There’s an old story about a Native American Chief who went to Washington DC one spring to advocate on behalf of his people. He was somewhat overwhelmed by the city, with horses and carriages and trains and construction and noise everywhere, and he was quite homesick. One afternoon, he was walking down the street with some business and congressional leaders when he suddenly stopped.

“What is it?” they asked.

“I hear a cricket,” he said.

“A cricket?” They laughed. “You’re out of your mind.”

But the old chief listened intently for a moment, and they stepped through a construction site to a tuft of grass at the base of brick wall. He carefully parted the grass a bit and sure enough, there was a cricket, chirping away as the afternoon faded. [*traditional*]

A parent knows their child’s cry. A lover can pick out their spouse from across a room. A runner knows his coach’s whistle, and a gymnast recognizes her father’s cheer from the stands. Learning to recognize the still small voice of God, even from unlikely sources, is learned through hours and years of devotion, prayer, worship, and study. It’s learned by an openness to the unexpected, the uncomfortable, and the unpredictable.

Which, in a sense, is where our scripture leaves us. Jesus’ mother and brothers have come to force him home. They’ve come to bring him to his senses. They’ve come, perhaps, to put a stop to all this craziness. But they can’t get through the crowd. So Jesus is told: “Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you.” And Jesus replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking 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.” Which can no way be interpreted to mean that Jesus rejects the bonds of family. On the contrary, he takes great pains to see that his mother is cared for as he is dying on the cross. But what it does seem to suggest is that it isn’t what runs through our veins so much as what hear in our hearts and echo in our living that has the power to touch the world. The family business is being open to the Spirit, open to love, open to what God is doing. To be sure, we are bound by blood, but not our own. We’re bound to one another by the blood that was shed for love of us. Thanks be to God. Amen.