

MARK 3:31-35

Third Sunday after Pentecost, June 25, 2017

Smith

WE ARE THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF CHRIST

31 Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." 33 "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. 34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

One of the great value of children getting involved in team sports even for just a season or two is that they can learn the value of not only how well they're doing personally, but how the whole team is doing. They encourage one another and they learn to trust each other's gifts – leadership skills emerge, and support skills emerge, and they learn things on the field or the track or the court that will stay with them all their lives. When they're playing on a team, we hope that they will also learn that their most important relationship on that team is with their coach. No matter how old or experienced the athlete, the coach is the one who teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains.

In life, that translates to our relationships with our various bosses, managers, employers, and others in authority over us. A good boss can make even a very difficult job a pleasure and rewarding. A bad boss can make even a simple job a burden and miserable.

Of course, when we're younger, all of our relationship orbit around our families. How we relate to our parents, our brothers and sisters, and then to our spouse and children, are except for a few very close friends, the most important relationships in our lives, for good or bad, because they shape how we relate to everybody else, including how we think, what we say, and what we do.

But our most important relationship is with God. Old Testament believers offered sacrifices, sang, prayed, and read Moses. They worshiped the same God we do, but we have an advantage and a blessing that they could only dream about. We have the words of the Savior, Jesus Christ. Consider for a moment just how much easier it is for us to think about God and to relate to God because of Jesus.

Jesus said things to clarify our faith and our mental picture of God. He said, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me" (Jn 14:11). And he said, "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30). He said, "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well" (Jn 14:7), and "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9).

This stuff makes our brains lock up and stop working for a second like a computer processing too much information – but like a new computer program, once we've

downloaded this, everything runs a lot more smoothly. Oh I get it! Jesus is God, and he and the Father are One. They're unified in everything. If Jesus says a thing, the Father agrees completely and never has to interrupt the Son or correct him. If the Son says it, the Father may as well have said it. And the same thing goes for the Holy Spirit, but we're just going to focus on the Father and the Son, and really mostly we're going to focus on the Son, because that's what the Father and the Holy Spirit want us to do, and that's what our text does, too.

So: we find Jesus herein the Gospel in a house somewhere in Galilee, probably near the Sea of Galilee. He has been teaching. He has been driving out demons. He recently chose his Twelve Apostles. And now, in this house, it's too crowded, packed solid with people, even for Jesus and his disciples to sit down and eat supper. The press of the crowd on the Lord is more amazing and confining than anything anyone's ever seen.

At this moment, his family arrives, or part of his family. Since before his baptism, there is no mention of Joseph, Mary's husband, and I think it's likely that Joseph had died. The family that shows up here is his mother Mary and, Mark tells us, his brothers. Now in the early verses of Mark 6 we're told that his brothers names are *James, Joseph, Judas* and *Simon*, and we're also told that Jesus had some sisters as well. Is it important that we know about these brothers and sisters of the Lord?

Well, yes and no. Yes, because the Bible briefly mentions them, and it seems like two of them, James and Jude, later became Christian leaders and wrote books of the Bible. But beyond that, no. Our religious leadership is not handed down from father to son like the Old Testament priesthood. And our religious leadership does not even depend on being handed down from Jesus' apostles in an unbroken chain down to us, which is sometimes called "Apostolic Succession." We are part of the apostolic and Christian church because we have the Scriptures and we believe in Jesus, and that's the point Jesus makes here in our text.

However, we should still say something about these brothers of Jesus, because there are some people who get pretty concerned about them and who they were or weren't. Although it's true that in some languages like New Testament Greek, the "brother" can stand in loosely for our word "cousin," this is never true when the word "brother" is used in connection as it is here with the word "mother." Now some people think that these brothers might have come from a previous marriage to Joseph, but it would be strange once again to use "brother" to mean "step-brother" in connection with Jesus' mother. So that leaves us with just about the only way to understand them, and that's as Jesus' younger brothers, since he was Mary's firstborn son, and that they would be the sons born to Mary and Joseph. The Bible does not say that Mary was always a virgin, but only that she remained a virgin until after Jesus was born. So it would be perfectly natural for her to conceive and raise a family with her husband Joseph.

Now – the point of this passage is not to establish that Jesus had biological brothers and sisters, and if you have a friend or a loved one who believes that Mary had no other children than Jesus, or if you yourself struggle with this, then please don't make that point an argument, because the Bible never makes it a point of faith. The virgin is a point of faith, but the relationship of Jesus to these brothers of his in our text is not.

In fact, whenever you get into a religious discussion with people you love or even people you meet, remember that some battles are so unimportant that they shouldn't be fought, and it might be best to just drop them altogether. What's important to remember is who Jesus is, and what Jesus did for us, and that's the point Jesus makes right now.

He does this when that crowd pressing in all around him and by now some of them were sitting in a circle around him started joining in with a messenger that his mother and brothers were here and wanted to see him. Maybe they wanted to meet his family, to find out more about him and maybe even to honor them.

But Jesus knew that human beings like us and like this crowd too often get sidetracked into what's not really important. And what's the important thing? The most important relationship we have in the whole world isn't even with our moms and dads and brothers and sisters. It's with our Lord Jesus Christ. So Jesus says, "No! You guys are my mom and my brothers and sisters and my family."

But wait. Is Jesus just holding his hand up against his mom and brothers because they wanted to stop him from preaching at this time? What happens if he finds out what a sinful man I am? Will he toss me out into the street and say, "Well, not this guy, either." Because we don't act much like his family and loved ones, do we? There are times when we want to reign in things Jesus says and make them sound not so bad, too.

But just like his mother Mary in our text, we've sinned, and that sets us outside the Lord's family. But that's the whole point of Jesus coming into the world. He came to forgive us, to rescue, and to give us the faith his talking about when he says that his real family does the will of the Father. You see, the Father's will is not that we keep a bunch of extra rules so we can get into heaven. The will of the Father was that the Son would come to rescue us from the present evil age (Gal. 1:4), and that we would put our faith in him, and follow him right through the grave and on into eternal life. That's what makes each one of us truly the brothers and sisters of Jesus – now and forever. Amen.