



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR B, JUNE 6, 2021

1 SAMUEL 8:4-11,16-20; PSALM 138; 2 CORINTHIANS 4:13-5:1; MARK 3:20-35

SHIFT IN THE ATMOSPHERE

Mark 3:20-35 *[The crowd came together again, so that Jesus and his disciples could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 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. "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"— for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit." Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he 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."]*

Today's gospel story describes a shift in the atmosphere. It starts with a scene that sounds chaotic. There were so many people crowded around that Jesus and his disciples couldn't eat. Jesus is accused of being out of his mind, and his family goes to restrain him. It doesn't tell us why, but maybe they were fearful for their own reputations by association, or of what might happen to Jesus by the authorities if he persists with teaching. The scribes act threatened.

Probably realizing that even if Jesus were out of his mind that still would not explain the passion of the crowd or the healings taking place, and so the scribes accuse him of being demonic.

Although the beginning starts with discord, by the end we are left with the calming presence of Jesus introducing a change, and redefining, expanding, who is considered family.

When told his family was looking for him, he doesn't stop what he is doing or become anxious himself.

Instead, he looks at those around him and says "here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

That must've been a surprising, perplexing and yet wonderous statement! It includes a call to action, to do the will of God, and it is also an invitation, to be part of a larger, lasting family.

It is not an abstract-concept kind of family, but very simply and directly brother, sister, mother. I do not believe those words were used lightly or casually.

It is also said in a definitive statement proclaiming now: "here ARE my mother and my brothers." Not "hope to be sometime" but they ARE, right in that moment.

The cross hasn't happened yet, but Jesus is already way ahead, describing Good News of how the Body of Christ works on earth as it is in heaven.

The message seems like it was maybe surprising news to the crowd, but today it is something most of us have probably heard before. We hear how we're supposed to see each other as brothers and sisters, and as our

family. But how can we take up that call to action and live out the invitation today?

If we follow Jesus' example, one way is to make a public statement of solidarity, to declare outside, out loud who our brothers and sisters are.

Over the past two weeks, we at St. Mark's Cathedral, local parishes and the ACLU have been reflecting on the anniversary of George Floyd's death.

It began with an ecumenical prayer service at St. James Cathedral centered upon the need for healing, repentance and prayer, and a shared commitment of working toward racial justice.

You may have seen it when driving by or seen the photos in the news. St. Mark's projected the words "George Floyd should be alive today" onto the outside wall of the Cathedral, to be seen by the surrounding cityscape.

Names of members of our communities killed by police officers in Western Washington, are continuing to be projected each night through June 8. In line with the stats, predominantly Black, Brown, Indigenous and Asian American Pacific Islander. One thing families can do is help each other remember. This is a way of remembering individuals killed by violence

who should be alive today, and it is a small step to move toward change.

This action has personally resonated with me because part of a deacon's role is to take the call to actions we hear inside church, outside. Deacons are called to be outward signs of the servant ministry of the Church, representing Christ's ministry of healing to the world.

Put another way, recognizing people met outside family as still brothers and sisters. But all of us as baptized Christians are called to seek and serve Christ is all persons, and of course we're not called to do it on our own strength, and not called to do it alone.

Jesus is calling us all to act; to do the will of God.

But what holds us back from accepting our calls and going deeper in them?

I am reading a book on violence and racism in America, published in 2011, called *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. It is an award-winning book by James Cone, and is equally, if not more relevant today than when it came out 10 years ago. I highly recommend it.

James Cone examines the differences between theologian Reinhold Niebuhr's vision of social justice and Martin Luther King, Jr's vision. Niebuhr was a celebrated progressive social thinker and prophetic

voice during the civil rights years and considered a great public theologian of the 20th century. He was known for his courage, clarity of thought and for seeing what others are blind to.

Both of those two contemporaries believed that expressing love in society is accomplished by doing justice.

King risked his life for civil rights while the author Cone, describes Niebuhr, who is white, as ultimately remaining safely teaching and writing in seminary. Cone states: "Unlike King, Niebuhr viewed agape love, as revealed in Jesus' cross, as an unrealizable goal in history – a state of perfection which no individual or group in society could ever fully hope to achieve."

In contrast, King didn't lose hope in agape love on earth because his faith and experience demanded it.

Cone concludes that Niebuhr's vision ultimately lacked the "empathic effort" required to translate his theology to action when it came to matters of race. Was there an internal shift towards redefining family and walking alongside one another that Niebuhr could have made and done?

Today, Jesus continues to point the way out of chaos, beckoning us to make the shift with him. When we do the will of God together,

that strength unites. Families are strong when they work together in Christ and treat each other as equals. Will we to continue the vision, building upon it after projecting it on our walls? Might we expand out who is considered family, police included?

When we are fearful, or lacking empathetic effort, or find ourselves working by our own strength, Jesus leads the way. The cross has

happened, and Christ is here with us, inviting us to be His family. Brothers and sisters, may we respond together and shift the atmosphere. Right now, right in this moment. We are invited to make a shared commitment. Guide us Lord, and may Your will be done, Amen.



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!