

Proper 5 Year B 2nd Week of Pentecost
The Rev. Chris Christy, Sermon
Genesis 3:8-15
Psalm 130
2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1
Mark 3:20-35

What Is Family?

Today's Gospel reading is full of some disturbing comments. "Jesus has Beelzebul" (a name derived from a Philistine God meaning a Demon or another word for Satan). Satan casting out Satan. Jesus is out of his mind (or gone crazy).

Notice the scribes' accusation. They had not come as objective observers. They were a delegation sent from Jerusalem to accuse Jesus of error. And their minds were already made up before they arrived. These scribes never considered that the reason Jesus could cast out demons was that He was the Messiah, sent from God. They were not open. Their minds were already made up. This man did not fit their theology.

You see, Jesus had been mounting a frontal assault on the kingdom of Satan. Never had anyone so aggressively tried to destroy Satan's work. When Jesus had come upon demon possessed individuals, the demons could not keep quiet, they made themselves known. And when they did, Jesus dealt with them. He delivered those who were demon oppressed and cast the out.

For some reason, this upset those religious leaders who were witnessing these events. So, they leveled their simplistic and illogical charge at Him. "He is possessed by Beelzebul . . . He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons."

Notice Jesus' reply, it was so simple and so logical. Basically, all He said was that a house divided cannot stand. He said that Satan would not oppose himself. Satan would not be that stupid. It was not logical. How could the devil make any progress if his kingdom were always at odds with itself? It simply could not survive under those conditions; and neither can any organization, business, family, or group.

What would your reaction be to a man who was flouting your traditions, preaching as if He has some special authority and revelation from God? What would you think if He claimed that people were tormented by demons and then proceeded to cast them out? What if he were your relative, perhaps your son? Well, that was precisely what Jesus was doing. But instead of praising God because of the good He was doing, His own family thought He was mad. They thought He had taken leave of his senses, that He was a madman.

It was still early in Jesus' ministry which led to his family thinking He was crazy. So, they tried to have a family intervention. They wanted to take Jesus back home to Nazareth and avoid any public embarrassment. They felt he had literally "lost his senses". After all, a little religion was a good thing. But He had taken this way too far, and He wasn't even following the traditions of the elders. He had become a fanatic. He was suffering from delusions of grandeur. So, the only thing left to do was to go and bring Him back home, where He would be out of the public eye, and try to get Him some help. If there were insane asylums in Jesus' day, He would have been committed. Men would have been dispatched to place Him in a straight-jacket and take Him away. And the ones who would do the committing would of been His own family.

Family, we all come from one. Some are loving, some are quirky, some are dysfunctional, some are abusive, and some are a combination of those things. No matter what type of family we have, we have a role to play within it: the Peacemaker, the Pretty One, the Black Sheep, the Smart One, the Religious One, the Baby, and so on. But what happens when the Black Sheep starts acting like the Smart One? Or the Peacemaker becomes the Artistic One? The delicate system of roles is shaken, and the other players must try to put the person back in their role or adjust to the new role that is being played. Guess which one folks usually choose?

Is there anyone here today who could stand up and say, “I have a perfect biological family?” I did not think so. One man described families this way: “Families are like fudge—mostly sweet, but with a few nuts.” Just like our biological families are not perfect, neither is the “Church”. You have often heard, “You can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family.” Well, when you choose Jesus, you also are choosing everyone in His family, and they are mostly sweet—but there are a few nuts, too.

Our families can be the source of the greatest joy and deepest heartaches. There is more emotion attached to our families than any other unit in society. Jesus has some revolutionary things to say about family in this Gospel reading.

When they told Jesus His mother and brothers were outside, Jesus asked a question and answered it with a revolutionary statement. He asked, “Who are my mother and brothers?” Then Jesus looked around the group and said, “This is my family. Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister, and mother.” Jesus was not rejecting His earthly family. He was just stating that a spiritual connection is stronger than any biological connection. You have heard the phrase, “blood is

thicker than water.” It usually implies that family ties are stronger than friendship bonds. But let me revise it: “Jesus’ blood is thicker than family blood.” In other words, Jesus is teaching us that the most important family in the world is the Family of God, the Church.

If everyone in your family is a follower of Jesus, then your biological family is part of your family of faith – that is ideal. But many times, a person will become Christian and other members of their family aren’t believers. They may be ostracized or even rejected by their families. There are many similarities between a biological family and the family of faith.

I recently read a story about a man who grew up in L.A. He wrote about a time when he was a young boy and how hard it was “to learn to love someone” who was unlikeable. He stated, one night the phone rang in the middle of the night. He heard his dad answer the phone and then suddenly drive away in his pickup truck. He later found out his dad drove from South Alabama to South Texas to pick up his great-uncle John whom he had never met. His uncle John had gotten into some trouble with the law as he crossed into the US from Mexico. Uncle John was a mess and his grown children had nothing to do with him. So having no where to go his dad brought Uncle John home and moved him in with the family and “**then**” guess whose bedroom he got!!!

This young boy remembered being angry and complaining to his mother asking, “Why does that old man have to live in our house”? He stunk and smoked all the time, and the boy did not “like” him at all. All the boy remembered was his mother smiling and saying, “You don’t have to like him, but you do have to “love” him because he’s family.” As years went by God changed this boy’s heart and he came to “love his uncle John he even “liked” him before he died.

We may smile at the story, but it speaks truth. Doing the will of God often means leaving our comfort zones. As Episcopalians, our Baptismal Covenant demands a life that follows God by continuing in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, in the prayers, resisting evil, repenting and returning to the Lord, proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves, striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being. This is not an easy road to journey! Yet we readily answer, "I will, with God's help."

We cannot do this alone. Jesus' single-minded focus on God's will is an example to us. We must have God's help to follow the call of Jesus to be the people we were created to be.

The same is true with God's family. God's Family is not perfect. There may be some people in our church whose personality you do not "like". That is okay, you do not have to like them, but you have to "love" them because they are family and we make allowances for family members. Some people are easy to love and some are easier to love. Sometimes people leave a church because there are members they do not like. Then they go join another church where they will find other people they do not like. There is no such thing as a perfect church. Mavis Williams wrote a poem about this.

The Perfect Church

If you should find the perfect church without one fault or smear,
For goodness sake! Don't join that church; You'd spoil the atmosphere.
If you should find the perfect church where all anxieties cease,
Then pass it by, lest by joining it, you'd mar the masterpiece.

But since no perfect church exists,
Made of imperfect men,
Then let's cease looking for that church and love the church we're in.
So let's keep working in our church,
Until the resurrection.
And then we each will join that Church without an imperfection!"

Many of you have a biological family, but there are many single adults and widows who attend our church. We are the place where God gives you a ready-made family. The Bible says, "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families." (Psalm 68:5-6) If you're looking for a family, Saint Luke's can be a branch of God's Family for you.

When Jesus defined God's family He said, "Whoever does God's will is my brother, sister and mother." Did you notice Jesus did not say "my Father?" That is because He only has one Father—our Heavenly Father. Jesus said the birthmark of the members of God's Family is that we strive to do God's Will.

Notice what the scribes had done. They had attributed the work of God to Satan. They had called the work of the Spirit of God the work of the devil. Their presumptuous and blasphemous attitude was putting their souls in eternal peril.

Many of us today do this same thing. It is usually the same kind of people who do it the "Religious People". When the Lord begins a work in the lives of people and they cannot fit it into their theology, they are quick to say it is the work of the devil. But this is exactly what the scribes did, and it is dangerous. We must be extremely careful before we attribute what may be the work of God to the devil. You see, your attitude makes all the difference.

Perhaps today you have seen the need to be a uniting factor in the local body here. You realize you have been anything but positive and supportive, and you need to make that right. A “**house divided cannot stand**”. So, “**Catch**” the vision and “**Commit**” yourself to it. Decide that you will walk hand in hand with the other brothers and sisters here to see God’s work accomplished in this place.

Amen