

Telling God's Story: Jesus' Mother and Brothers

Luke 8:19-21

Lesson 15 *Telling God's Story* by Peter Enns

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What the Parent Should Know: *Jesus' ministry was a popular one, with crowds following him everywhere. In an age of security measures protecting our politicians, it is probably hard for us to grasp how easily accessible someone of Jesus' stature was in the ancient world.*

In this story, Jesus isn't displaying disrespect or apathy towards his biological family (his mother, Mary, and his brothers, listed in Mark 6: 3). It is true that his family really wanted to see him but were prevented by the crowd. After all, Jesus could have said to the crowd, "Can you give us a few minutes?" Instead, Jesus turns this into a lesson that is consistent with what he has been saying in the previous two parables in chapter 8 of Luke: the parable of the sower (8:1-15) and the parable of the lamp on a stand (8:16-18).

Both parables speak to the importance of hearing and doing. In the parable of the sower, three times the seed falls on harsh ground, not suited for growing, and so the plants do not flourish. All three soils represent those who only hear the word of God. It is only the seed that falls on "good soil" where the hearer "retains it" and perseveres (8:15), that yields a crop. In the same way, a lamp is not to be hidden, but put on a stand so that it actually gives off light. Having a lamp, i.e., "listening," is not enough. One must act.

In this passage about Jesus' mother and brothers, Jesus is not disparaging his biological family. Instead, he is using the moment to emphasize how those who hear and do God's word are his "family." We have seen elsewhere (Lesson 10) that faith rather than ethnic identity is the mark of the kingdom of God. That faith is not simply an internal "belief" but a faith that is accompanied by a new pattern of living. And this is not limited to ethnic Israel, but open to all, Jew and Gentile. In both cases, being a part of Jesus' "family" is not determined by "biology" but an active faith.

Likewise, for us today, having an active faith—both believing and doing—is a mark of the intimate, familial relationship with him that we claim. We who put God's word into practice are his family (v.21).

Begin by reading aloud:

Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you."

He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."

Jesus spent a lot of time traveling around, telling people about God. He probably wasn't home very often. One day, Jesus' mother and brothers really wanted to see him, but there were so many people surrounding Jesus, they couldn't get close. Someone else had to tell Jesus they were there.

When he was told that his family wanted to see him, Jesus said something that sounds very strange to us. He didn't say "Sure, let them through." He said, "My mother and brothers are those who *hear* what I have to say and then *do* it."

This does not mean that Jesus didn't love his family. He did. But Jesus used opportunities like this to teach something. He is saying here that those who follow him become his family. And to follow Jesus, to be his disciple, means to *listen* to what Jesus says, and then try to *behave* that way.

Sometimes a best friend can become like a member of your family—or you can feel like your best friend's family is *your* family. You can go to each other's houses and not feel like strangers. You can help yourself to food from the fridge, play in your friend's yard, without even having to ask permission. You can spend the night at your friend's house, and he (or she) can spend the night at yours.

This is the sort of family that Jesus is talking about. He says that families are not just the people who are born related to each other. Families are people who love each other and decide to be with each other. Jesus is saying that all of his followers can be as close to him as his mother and his brothers. If they love him and follow what he says, they will become part of his family. And if we love and follow Jesus, we become part of his family as well.