

Related by Faith

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Mark 3: 20-35

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2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—“I believed, and so I spoke” —we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Mark 3: 20-35

and the crowd came together again, so that they 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.”

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Imagine your oldest brother has always been known to be the Savior, the Messiah, that his coming into the world began with an angelic pronouncement and his birth in a stable was serenaded by a multitude of the heavenly host. His first visitors were shy shepherds and gift-bearing Magi. Soon after his birth your parents fled with him to safety in Egypt.ⁱ Other than the time when he was 12 and had remained in the temple after the Passover pilgrimage to sit and learn more from the teachers in his “Father’s house,”ⁱⁱ life has been quiet, ordinary, nothing special despite just how special, how anointed, how divine, your brother is.

Then there is a wedding in Cana at which you and your family are among the guests. In an awkward and embarrassing moment for the groom and his family, there is no more wine. Your mother tells your brother that the wine is gone, but he does not see that as having anything to do with him. He tells your mother that his time has not yet come.

But your mother knows something about his heart, his character. Her motherly wisdom sees something now for your brother. She sees the time he does not yet see. She sees he is ready to begin meeting the needs of others, to pour out the wine of joy, love, generosity, and suddenly, incredibly, your oldest brother turns jars of ordinary water into delicious wine.ⁱⁱⁱ

From that day forward everything has changed, and it has changed radically, dramatically. Your brother leaves home and you begin to hear many things about him. Some make you proud, excited and joyful, knowing this time would come for your unique, extraordinary brother. Other things you hear make you worry, make you fearful, concerned and anxious. You and your family could not have imagined how quickly his actions and reputation would spread. Are these facts? Are these rumors? You hear wild tales of spirits and demons, of holes broken through roofs so that a paralyzed man could walk again. Your brother's new and growing circle of friends includes a tax collector, unemployed fishermen and a former prostitute. He is virtually homeless and contentedly so. He wanders the region to heal what no doctor or medicine could, to teach in challenging riddles without clear answers, and forgiving people as one with the authority to do so. He flips everyone's understanding of the Sabbath. He teaches people to pray to Abba, to his Father, to the father that you do not share. People call him the Son of God, but he wants to keep that quiet, and asks them to tell no one. The Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes are furious and threatening because of his radical teachings and defiance. They say he has Beelzebul, the demon of all demons. Your brother is newly out into the world and work that he was born to do, yet you fear for his safety, his sanity, perhaps his life.

Your brother is going home for the first time since leaving, since everything for him has changed. It is almost a 20 mile walk from Nazareth to Capernaum, as you, your mother and sisters and brothers travel a full day to check on him, to see just how true or how false the things are that you have been hearing. He has his new friends and followers, his ministry, but you are family, and there are no stronger ties than blood, than the history and the memories that you all share.

When you arrive, you are astounded at the massive crowd outside his door. Crowds of those who are lame, ill, demon-possessed, and more huddle in patient hope for the healer to restore them to health. You cannot yet see your brother but you can hear him saying something about Satan casting out Satan, about a house dividing against itself and a strong man being plundered. The concern and worry you and your family have grows even more. Then you catch a glimpse of him. He is thinner, he looks exhausted and worn out. You have heard that he is out of his mind. In his care for everyone else, he has forgotten himself. You all agree, this must stop. He needs rest, care and food. Together you push and excuse your way through the crowd, working your way to the front door. Together you and your family are ready to restrain your brother.^{iv}

You clearly hear the accusation that he has an unclean spirit, and then his bold response. "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."

In the midst of all that is happening, you cannot understand the meaning of those words, but they will stay with you, they will echo within you, as his ministry grows, as his wonders and

signs grow, as he is arrested, crucified and gloriously resurrected. It will take time and the experience of Jesus' work and words for you to understand that he was not talking about blaspheming the Holy Spirit as speaking cuss and cursing words, but about a hardened heart which undermines, negates, denies the work of One who empowers Jesus' followers with spiritual gifts to live out the good news. Unforgivable blasphemy claims Satan is the source of Jesus' powers and faith, and so acts in ways of hate, exclusion, and the rejection of God's beloved people and creation.

But that is all ahead of you. Today you and your family are standing at the doorway ready to care for your brother. Someone announces that you are all here to see him, and you anticipate a hugging reunion, but only his words come out to you.

“Who are my mother and my brothers?”.....“Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

You are stunned by his words. They sting at first. You are his family, you grew up together and shared so much over all those years. Now you are being cast aside for new friends, for strangers. You traveled all this way in concern, and now have been forgotten, been dismissed.

Then, wait, -----suddenly it all makes sense.

Jesus is adding to the family, not taking away from what you have always known. To be in Jesus' family is to hear and do what God is saying through him. This family, Jesus' growing family, is related not by blood, but by the bonds of faith, justice, love, inclusion, equality, grace, care, compassion.

Jesus is radically changing the world, and perceptions of who is welcomed and loved and forgiven by God. This is how grace will extend to more and more people, how thanksgiving and glory to God will increase.

Standing with your mother and siblings among the crowd gathered to see your brother, you cannot see what will come from this family whose bloodline is the will of God.

In years, in centuries, to come, every time the family of God gathers for Communion, or a covered-dish fellowship supper or donates food to a pantry for those who are food insecure, or who fills a bag with clothing for those in need, or who listens to the painful challenges someone is facing, or who prays for the needs of the world, or helps to fund a ministry, the world looks at this wonderfully odd and amazing family born from the Gospel, from the good news. Amen.

ⁱ Lk 2:1-20

ⁱⁱ Lk 2: 41-51

ⁱⁱⁱ Jn 2: 1-12

^{iv} James Boyce ~ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-10-2/commentary-on-mark-320-35-2>