

Payson United Methodist Church
Sermon Series “When the Spirit Moves”
Being Renewed
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Mark 3:20-35
NIV Translation

²⁰ Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family^[a] heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

²² And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.”

²³ So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. ²⁷ In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”

³⁰ He said this because they were saying, “He has an impure spirit.”

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.”

The theme from our text this week is that renewal isn’t always easy to come by. Jesus went home and found a disturbing environment. Sometimes the place we think will renew us does the opposite and becomes draining. Those we thought were on our side turn out to be against us. It happens in families and in communities both. How do we reinterpret the beloved community of faith? What does it mean to be one family in God?

Jesus went home. He named his inner circle of disciples, and he went home. He called it a day. He healed a man on the Sabbath, it turns out, and got into a mess of trouble; and then he called the inner circle and went home. The last time he was home, someone tore a hole in his roof and lowered a paralyzed man into the living room. Then he called a friend, had a party - got called out for that one, too, went on a hike with his new friends,

and they plucked some grain from a field they were wandering through, and got in trouble for that: reaping on the Sabbath. Then he healed a man and called his inner circle and went home. Before that, he got baptized and spent some time alone in the wilderness, cast out some demons, some of whom seemed to recognize him, but he told them to keep quiet about it; and he healed and walked and found need everywhere he went.

That's where we start this week. He went home – except it wasn't home. Other translations don't say home. One says he entered a house or the place he was staying. In other gospels, the text says he doesn't have a home. But maybe that's after he tried to go. Maybe that is the result of finding that homes aren't the haven you hoped they would be.

Jesus went home and found a family who thought he was crazy. He was used to dealing with those who thought he was crazy. Par for the course these days. Sometimes my family thinks I am crazy!

The religious authorities have started to show up to challenge Jesus and have become worried, and they have begun to plot how to destroy him. At the time of Jesus, the authorities would first try to publicly discredit and shame Jesus, because without the backing of the crowds, Jesus is no threat whatsoever. He could just be sent back to the backwoods of Galilee where he belongs.

The religious authorities are attacking Jesus' honor, because they want to destroy his public reputation in order to maintain social order. Israel is under occupation by the Romans. And if the authorities from Jerusalem do not maintain social order, they will be punished and possibly the whole city and country.

Anyway, the fighting scribes of Jerusalem are pretty convinced they got him this time. All these things he can do. See, that's the crux of the problem here. Jesus' reputation is growing – the healing, the teaching. People keep commenting on his authority and the crowds are flocking to his side to hear his words, to reach for his touch, to let his shadow pass over them. The scribes are seeing their ratings dwindle, and they don't like it. So, they come and set up a press conference outside the house where Jesus is and say, "Sure, he can do all this stuff, fancy stuff, unexplainable stuff, but it is because he is using black magic! He is consorting with demons!"

"He is working with Satan!" "Think about it," Jesus says, "Does that make sense? I'm dismantling Satan's kingdom, threatening Satan's power. You think I'm working for his team? I've tied him up and am plundering what used to be thought of as his house! I'm claiming the treasure he has stolen back, the treasure which is you. All of you. You who really belong to God. You are a part of God's family."

Family. Then someone remembers that he was supposed to tell Jesus about the family that has come for him. "Hey Jesus, your mom is here. Your brothers and sisters are here. They want you. You've broken curfew. You've soiled the family name. You need to get home and have some sense knocked back into you," they say.

Jesus smiles and says, “Family. My family is here already.” It sounds mean to our ears. It is as if he was divorcing the group he grew up with, the mother who gave him birth. You don’t count, we hear; you aren’t important.

But it is not so much a dismissal of his family as it is a statement of inclusion. The family, those to whom we owe allegiance and honor and welcome and love, above all love, is not a small circle but an almost unimaginably large one. Anyone who loves God with all their heart and soul and mind and strength. That’s the family. Jesus was not being disrespectful to his family, but he was setting forth an important principle. In Christ there are ties stronger even than blood.

My Aunt Addie was the wife of Uncle Bus, my mother’s brother. Aunt Addie and Uncle Bus would come visit our family every summer. Aunt Addie, one of my favorite aunts, always called me Christie Lou. (Please don’t repeat that!) She was a teacher and was full of new ideas and lots of laughter. She always said, “Never be afraid to ask questions.” She planted the seed for me to grow up to become a teacher.

When I was in fifth grade and had my tonsils removed, I had serious complications in the healing process. It was Uncle Bus who donated a pint of blood for my transfusion, so we were definitely blood relatives.

Nearly twenty years later when they came to visit me in Atlanta, Georgia, where I was teaching 5th grade, Uncle Bus came down with chicken pox after being exposed to my then five-year old son Michael who had chicken pox. Not a very fair thank you for my blood transfusion! But they were family and carried no ill feelings. I have lots of wonderful memories of family.

But Jesus asks, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And we could add aunts and uncles? His answer is one of the most radical statements in the Gospel because it announces a whole new way of being family and the abandonment of blood-relations as the primary bond that defines and orders one's life.

Remember Jesus was packed in this crowd, and his mother and brothers came and are standing in the doorway. They called out to him. It was either so packed with people, or perhaps just so noisy in the space, that Jesus couldn’t hear his family calling to him. So, some people seated near Jesus say to him, “Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for you.”

In response, Jesus says what no mother ever wants to hear, “Who are my mother and brothers?” Can you imagine ever having your child say this to you? Really, can you imagine the pain that Jesus’ mother must have felt? Even if Jesus’ action in denying his mother is meant as a way to establish a more well-connected community of followers, his actions have a powerfully hurtful impact on his mother nevertheless.

Jesus responds by upsetting everyone’s understanding of family by creating a new definition. It is all those who do God’s will. This is an expansion of the understanding of family. Jesus was making family bigger. He was making family more inclusive. He was

redefining father, mother, brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts to include more than just those who would show up on a genealogy chart.

What a beautiful thought.

Here is the Good News: Jesus is not out of his mind; Jesus is not filled with demonic spirits. Rather, Jesus has the mind of God; Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit and invites all of us to be of the same mind and same Spirit in a new family as his sisters and brothers.

The Holy Spirit which unifies us by being within all of us who believe. We are constantly renewed by the Spirit.

Not a family defined by genetics but a bigger, broader family! An open family where whoever does God's will is brother, sister, mother, father. To be broadened to include not just the Jews, but the Gentiles as well. Not just the Pharisees but the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the Samaritans. And all races, all sexes, all colors, all religions, everyone.

During the 90's while living in Alaska, my husband Tom and I invited a young Turkish college student to live in our home. He wanted to live with a quote "normal US family." I had never met a Muslim before. When he did not eat or drink or even brush his teeth between sunrise and sunset during Ramadan, I learned why. When he did not eat pork, I learned why. He became like a son to us, a real part of our "normal" family. His parents and sister visited us in Alaska and here in Arizona, too. We visited his parents and sister in Istanbul twice. We became family to each other. Haluk, now in his early fifties and living in Luxemburg, is still like a son to us and Tom and he have monthly Facetimes together dreaming about world events and future visits. Haluk is family.

Several years ago, we became good friends with our horse groomer in Tennessee and his wife and two sons. Gabe is an undocumented thirty-nine-year-old man who came to the United States from Mexico about twenty years ago. This hard worker, this kind and caring young man calls Papa Tom several times a week and shares stories about the horses he is breaking, the chickens and cattle he is raising, stories about his son's high school graduation, stories about the vegetables from his garden that his wife is sharing with their neighbors. We pray every day that his immigration paperwork that we are helping to sponsor will be processed and allow him to stay in our country legally. Gabe is family.

The Holy Spirit is working in other voices, other faces, other places, other identities, and other communities where we previously have been unwilling or unable to see God at work.

Amidst this challenging perspective, one that calls us to consider our own practices and prejudices, it's worth noting, I don't think Jesus is being anti-family. He cares about his family.

And this is our call as a community. Our call as a congregation, our call as a faith community, our call is to be family. We are not just to share our love with one another, we are to share in life with each other. Our call is to know each other, to live with one another, to celebrate each other's celebrations, and to mourn each other's losses.

Dar Harris and Kathleen Loader shared during our recent Emmaus grouping how our family foundations helped build our characters and how we as sisters continue to help each other expand our faith. We are family!

I am often calling on you to help with something. Ted Corley, Tom Janssen, Tracey Herbert, Jim Sargent and Pastor Michael all answered my cries to help move the altar from the main floor level to the loft here. Quite a feat for a piece of furniture that is solid oak and very heavy! We are family!

Brenda and Jim Mouw are always responding to requests to creatively decorate our Celebration Hall. We are family!

When I had hip replacement surgery right before Christmas, Sally Harvey saved my chocolate addiction by bringing me an entire container of chocolate brownies. She is my family!

As the body of Christ, as the family of faith, we are not just another neighborhood who passes each other by, but we are mothers, brothers, fathers, sisters, aunts and uncles, all children of God sharing in life together. So today, let us claim all as our family.

“You are family! I want to get to know you!” Today isn't just a church worship service – it's a family reunion.

And we are being renewed in the Holy Spirit.