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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Proper 5 (Pentecost 3), Series B
Saturday, June 9th, 2018
Sunday, June 10th, 2018

Sermon: Jesus' Family¹
Texts: Mark 3:20-35

Focus Statement: By faith, Jesus joins us into his new family, the Church.

Function Statement: That they would believe in their brother Jesus.

Sermon Structure: Story-Framed

Doctrinal Locus: "I believe that Jesus Christ... has redeemed me..., that I may be His own..."
(SC, 2nd Article of Apostles' Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. I once heard a pastor say that in order to go into full-time ministry, you need to be half crazy. Many of my family members thought I was a bit crazy to change majors and transfer colleges mid-course in order to prepare for seminary and enter the ministry. Why in the world would I suddenly decide to become a *pastor* of all things? While once held in high regard, pastors are now disregarded as one of the least impressive professions by our culture—ranked right above car salesman (Pastoral Care, Inc.)! At least 100 times before I started seminary, my Granddad asked me, "Are you *sure* you really want to be a *pastor*?!" (And he wasn't the only one!)

Today in our Gospel lesson, we are surprised to find that *Jesus'* family and friends all thought he was a little crazy for going into the ministry. When they heard how hard Jesus was working, teaching and healing at all hours of the night (Mark 1:32-39), with barely a wink of sleep or a bite to eat (3:20), Jesus' family decided that he'd lost it! He'd gone off the

¹ This sermon was originally preached on June 9th and 10th, 2012, at Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado.

reservation, off his rocker—he'd "flipped." Whichever way you put it, he seemed out of control (3:21).

Jesus looked to be in danger of burning out. And despite all the good he was doing, he was attracting unwanted attention from the religious establishment, who were none too pleased with Jesus' rising popularity and influence. Already they were plotting his demise, seeking "how to destroy him" (Mark 3:6). Vicious rumors even circulated that Jesus might be demon-possessed (3:22-30). "For they were saying he has an unclean spirit" (Mark 3:20, ESV).²

So Jesus' family tried to do what most families would do if they saw another family member spinning out of control. They decided to do an intervention. They went to Capernaum and tried to seize Jesus, presumably to bring him home to Nazareth so he could take a break and rest a while before everything fell apart.

Of course, Jesus' family didn't understand him. In John's Gospel, we are told his own brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5). Later, when Jesus went home to preach in the synagogue at Nazareth, his neighbors' attitude changed from marvel to murder in the blink of an eye, so that Jesus had to admit, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household" (Mark 6:4).

Sometimes our greatest naysayers are the members of our own families. "Just who do you think *you* are?" your parents or siblings might say when you start dreaming dreams too big for the family's usual fare. Maybe you were the first one in your family to move off the farm, leave town, or go to college. "What makes you think you're better than us?" "Why are you getting all uppity?"

² All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

Or perhaps to spare you the disappointment and discouragement they've experienced in life, they might encourage you to set your sights lower and not try so hard to jump over the bar. After all, what's wrong with more reasonable, realistic expectations? Not everyone is born to become the President or play in the NFL, you know!

Jesus' family needed to talk some sense into him—and bring him back down to earth. There was talk going around that he was making himself out to be the Son of *God!* But when they showed up at the door, Jesus' mother and brothers didn't get the response they were hoping for. The house was so crowded that they couldn't even get to Jesus. And when a messenger told him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you" (1:32), he barely even acknowledged their existence.

"*Who's* here? My mother and brothers? Oh... But look around you!" And then, stretching out his arms to gesture to the room full of packed disciples, Jesus said, "*Here* are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, *he* is my brother and sister and mother" (3:34-35).

Ouch! This must've seemed like a slap in the face to Jesus' relatives. He didn't even recognize his own family? Truly, he'd lost it!

Now don't get me wrong: Jesus didn't intend to be disrespectful. He knew the Fourth Commandment, "Honor your father and your mother..." But Jesus needed his earthly family and disciples to understand that he had come to create a *new* kind of family. Jesus came to bring people into *God's* family through the power of God's Word. "For whoever does the will of God, *he* [or she] is my brother and sister and mother" (3:35).

And Jesus wants *you* to be part of his family too! That's why he bought you with his blood and made us sons and daughters of God by adoption (cf. Rom. 8:15). "Beloved, we are

God's children now..." (1 John 3:2). God is our heavenly Father, as we confess in the Lord's Prayer. And Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our brother in the flesh.

Jesus says that whoever does the will of God is his mother and brother and sister—part of God's family (Mark 3:35; cp. Eph. 2:19). In Luke's Gospel, it's whoever *hears* the Word of God and keeps it (Luke 11:28). You become part of God's family by *his* will (John 1:12-13).... So what *is* the will of God?

God's will is for us to believe in his Son. If "we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us" (1 John 3:23), then we're part of the family! You join God's family by believing in Jesus and his Word. You are born or adopted into your earthly family. But, as Jesus said in last week's Gospel lesson, you must be "born again" by "water and the Spirit" to become part of God's family (John 3:3, 5). When you are baptized or hear the Gospel and receive God's forgiveness, you become Jesus' mother and brother and sister. *You* belong to God's family!

For some of us, being part of a new family of faith sounds like a wonderful relief! After all, many of us have come from "broken" homes and experienced ruined relationships with our family members, whether because of divorce, adultery, addiction, or sibling rivalry. As our Old Testament lesson indicates, ever since the Fall into sin, family relationships have broken down in blame and shame, jealousy, and distrust (Gen. 3:8-15). If you have not had the best experience with your earthly family, it can be a great relief to know that God is your Father now (1 John 3:1), Jesus is your brother (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11-13), and we are all together brothers and sisters in Christ. Here is a family forged through the forgiveness Jesus won for us on the cross! Truly, God is the "Father of the fatherless" (Ps. 68:5). Even if your mother and father abandon you,

God will never forsake you; the Lord will take you in (Ps. 27:10). The Church is a family of faith built on the foundation of God's grace and Jesus' unconditional love.

And yet, for some of us, being part of God's family may put us at odds with our earthly family. Just as Jesus' family thought he was crazy, so also your family may find you strange and intolerable because of your Christian faith.

Have you ever noticed how strange—and even offensive—your Christian beliefs may seem to your unbelieving relatives? A little bit of religion is okay, of course—“everything in moderation!” A little bit of church and Bible reading promotes good morals and builds character—kind of like eating your vegetables. But when you get older, you're supposed to do away with all those “myths” and “fairytale” about virgin births and rising from the dead. Does anyone really even believe “all that stuff” anymore these days?

Even many non-religious, “spiritual”-type people will resonate with some of the fine teachings of the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount. But as soon as you start talking about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, confessing your sins, serving the Lord, putting God first in your life, or following Jesus as the only way of salvation, you are bound to offend people. They'll think you've gone off your rocker and lost it! “He's lost it!” “She's out of her mind!” (cf. Mark 3:21). People may even say that you're being “judgmental,” “fundamentalist,” or that most deadly of all modern sins: “intolerant.”

We shouldn't be surprised that taking up our cross to follow Jesus can put us crossways with our family and friends. Jesus warned this would happen: “A person's enemies will be those of his own household” (Matt. 10:36). Jesus' family just tried to quiet him and calm him down. But there are some places around the world—Communist and Muslim countries, for instance—where your family will have you arrested or even *kill* you because of your faith in Christ. Here

in America, you might not get invited to family functions anymore; you may be treated like an outsider among your own flesh and blood because of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The world cannot tolerate the cross of Christ and Jesus' exclusive claim to be "*the way, the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6). And so they will seek to kill and destroy those who confess this saving truth.

In such a world, only a fool or madman would follow Jesus. So call me crazy—and give me the T-shirt too! Better to be branded a "Jesus freak" or a religious nut than go through life with a lukewarm faith and half-hearted devotion to the Savior. Better to face ridicule, misunderstanding, and even persecution from family and friends than to deny the faith and forget the one who gave up everything to save you from your sins. Indeed, whoever loves father or mother, brother or sister, more than Jesus is not worthy of being his disciple (Matt. 10:37). But to those who lose everything to follow Christ, Jesus promises a rich reward: "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). Though you lose friends and family in this life, you will gain a heavenly family for *eternal* life.

Dear Christian friends, look around you! [*Gesture to church.*] *This* is your family! "Here are [your] mother and [your] brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is [your] brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:34-35). God in Christ Jesus has given you a new family: the Christian Church.

Of course, our ultimate hope is that everyone we know and love would be saved, that each and every one of our friends and family would repent and believe the Good News of Jesus (Mark 1:15)! Family matters to God, and so it matters to us! Even in his dying woes, Jesus

provided for his mother Mary, entrusting her to the care and protection of his disciple John (John 19:26-27). But the most important thing you can give your family is the Gospel. The Scriptures lay great emphasis on sharing your faith with your family. A believing spouse may yet save an unbelieving one (1 Cor. 7:16). A foolish and sinful child may yet turn and be saved (Luke 15). You may win over your erring brother or sister (Matt. 18:15). And it's never too late to pray for your parents to come to faith in Christ.

Yes, we must love and serve and pray for our earthly families. But no matter how much pain and suffering, guilt or grief your earthly family may cause you, your heavenly Father wants to fill you with peace and joy. And so he gives you a new family. Again, Jesus says, "whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35). *You* are Jesus' family. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.