

Sermon + June 6, 2021

Mark 3:20-35

Frank H. Maxwell

So . . . did you hear about the guy who ordered a pizza? When the waiter brought it to his table, he asked the man if he wanted it cut into six pieces or eight pieces. The man thought for a moment, and then replied, *“Better make it eight. I’m extra hungry.”*

Well some things just don't make sense. In today's lesson from Mark's gospel, Jesus realized that the charges being brought against him were just plain nonsense. And so Jesus spoke. He spoke about distorting the truth and he spoke about divisions within the family of God. And when Jesus spoke . . . he spoke with authority.

As this passage begins, Jesus' family has come to take him away. There is a rumor circulating among the people that Jesus is crazy. His family, wishing to save him any further embarrassment, figures they will quietly take him home. Sensing their intention, Jesus turns and addresses all who have gathered: his family, his disciples, the scribes and pharisees and the crowd. His words are forceful and pointed.

He talks of a house divided and blasphemy and the family of God. Jesus is beside himself . . . he's been trying so hard. People thought he was mad . . . and why shouldn't they . . . he went against the grain. What must have been so frustrating for him was that his ethic of love brought a charge of madness.

But think about it . . . how often, throughout the course of history, have some of our most brilliant people been considered crazy in their own day: Wright brothers, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Albert Einstein, Steve Jobs.

And so . . . in response . . . Jesus speaks his mind. He first talks about a house divided. A house that is divided against itself is unable to stand. Abraham Lincoln used this same passage to describe a United States that was comprised of slave and free.

A church that is divided into all sorts of splinter and special interest groups cannot properly function for it is greatly weakened. Imagine how strong the Christian church could be if it spoke with one voice.

Jesus next addresses the charge of blasphemy that has been brought against him. Jesus had forgiven sins (an act reserved only for God).

Of course Jesus, being God in human form, could forgive sins. But the scribes didn't believe that Jesus was the Son of God . . . it was too much of a stretch for them.

And what do we do when we don't understand someone or something? We make fun of it. We ridicule it. The greatest sin is the distortion of the spiritual being of God.

Jesus finally considers "family" and not just his own family. This was really a central theme throughout Jesus' ministry. We tend to think of family only in terms of our own biological family . . . Jesus would have us look beyond. He poses a question: "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?"

Noted Lutheran- scholar Martin Marty, in his book, *By Way of Response*, calls for commitment to the breaking of the tribalistic barriers that separate one person from another . . . one church from another, community from community and even entire nations. We are still hung up on being tribes.

School spirit / town spirit is great but we need to get beyond our *better than* frame of mind.

Marty concludes: "*Our mothers and brothers and sisters are 'everyone.' We can retain our tribal identity, but we never dare let it cloud our vision!"*"

A story is told of an orphaned boy who was living with his grandmother when their house caught on fire. The boy was upstairs and the grandmother died attempting to rescue him. The boy cried for help but the flames were so intense that no one could get into the house to reach him. Finally, a man climbed an iron drain pipe and came down with the boy holding onto his neck.

The boy had lost his only family member in the fire. A public hearing was held to determine in whose family the boy should now be placed. Those who gave reasons for wanting the boy in their families included a teacher, a farmer and a wealthy citizen. As they gave their reasons, the boy's eyes were focused on the floor.

Then a stranger walked to the front of the room. As he walked, he slowly removed his hands from his pockets. In doing so he revealed the scars on his hands. The crowd gasped.

The boy jumped from his seat and ran up and threw his arms around the man's neck. This was the man who had saved his life and the scars were from climbing the hot pipe. The decision had been made by the boy. Everyone agreed that he ought to become a part of the family of the man who had saved his life.

We are all part of the spiritual family of God. As we share the love of God made known to us through the example of Jesus, we become a part of this human family. "*Whoever does the will of God is our mother or father; brother or sister.*"

If one is mad for looking beyond the boundaries of our biological families, then let us be nuts together. They called Jesus crazy because he dared to care. And he took them to task for their narrow view of family. Jesus said that we are all members of one great family . . . the family of God.

He said that we are all brothers and sisters. And still many called him crazy. But maybe that was his strange madness.

Maybe he was crazy . . . crazy with love. Let it be so for us as well.
Amen.