**Morning Praise @ Home 9th June 2024**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading Mark 3: 20 – end

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**Reflection from Philip**

**Sermon Mark 3:20-35 – God’s family**

What is it that makes us part of God’s family?

These days, families come in all shapes and sizes. It’s not uncommon for parents to live in separate homes or for children to have stepbrothers and sisters from a parent's previous relationship.

However, most of us (no matter what our faith or otherwise) still believe in the importance of family, no matter what shape it takes today. A framework to provide stable love and companionship, to raise and nurture children and to respect and care for the older generations.

So Jesus’ comments in this passage from Mark about his family can be difficult to understand.

We read of his mother and step-brothers coming to where he is at a crowded meeting in a house. His family thinks he is deluded. What led them to think this?

He was so immersed in his ministry that they worried he wasn’t prioritising his own care. Jesus had been out in the country by Lake Galilee, and now returns. Hearing that he was there, a large crowd gathers at the house. So insistent was the crowd, and so intense their needs, they wouldn’t let him eat even “a piece of bread.” They were worried he wasn’t taking care of himself.

It was also his religious enthusiasm. They were worried about that too. If you heard that your step-brother was talking about the Kingdom of God being near, forgiving people’s sins, and reportedly healing sick people and supposedly casting out demons, what would you think?! It’s as though they felt he needed rescuing from a cult. His own cult.

So, they went to collect him and bring him home. But in doing so, they want to prevent him from carrying out ‘his mission’. A mission that was the very reason for Jesus’ life among us on earth. People often think they are close enough to Jesus to be ‘in his family’.

But Jesus points out there are no automatic relationships. His brothers didn’t get special treatment – they didn’t believe him. Even though crowds had followed him, he had healed the lame, restored the blind to sight, healed the lepers, they don’t believe him. After all, he’s just ‘one of them’ – a country boy from Nazareth. A carpenter’s son.

It’s easy to think that because we have contact with Jesus, we are part of his family. We go to church, we might call ourselves Christians, we might mix with other Christians, but this is not enough; it does not make us part of God’s family.

Having contact with or being related to someone who has contact with Jesus does not make us a member of his true family. Growing up in a Christian family, going to Sunday school, maybe a youth group, and attending Church are all good things, but they are not enough. A real relationship with Christ is needed to be a member of God’s family.

Before completing the account of Jesus’ family coming to ‘rescue’ him, Mark interjects another story (he often does this – we see many of Mark’s accounts ‘sandwiching’ others, in fact they are even called ‘a Markean sandwich’!).The scene changes to another group of people who were not in God’s family, even though they thought they were.

The religious scholars and teachers think Jesus is not just delusional, but that he is evil. They are determined to end his ministry – and if necessary, his life.

Their religious expertise wasn’t enough to be part of Jesus’ true family. They thought they were in God’s family, but their knowledge and expertise weren’t enough.

Mark has shown us who is not in God’s family – those who are close to Jesus but don’t believe, and those who are religious experts but don’t recognize the truth of who Jesus is.

Now Jesus answers the question for us: Who is in his family? The true family of Jesus are described as those who do God’s will.

Mark now returns to the story of Jesus’ family coming to ‘collect’ him. When the family arrives to rescue Jesus, they can’t get past the crowd. So they send someone to get him. The crowd realises and they tell Jesus that his mother and brothers are outside.

‘Hey, Jesus, your Mum and brothers are here! They assume that Jesus will surely respond to them once he knows they are outside wanting to talk to him. Jesus gives what at first seems to be an abrupt and harsh reply.

Jesus responds ‘*Who are my mother and brothers? Who is my family?*’ Obviously, he was saying, not them. Though physically related, they aren’t truly part of his family. They are close, but not close enough.

It sounds as though he is dismissing, almost abusing his family. But Jesus isn’t showing disrespect here. Instead, he uses this interruption to address the deeper issue of what is involved in an authentic relationship with him.

Jesus says: ‘*My family members aren’t those outside who think they are connected to me, they are those here who do God’s will’*.

A commitment to Jesus is a major commitment. It requires everything. Following Jesus can come at a cost, as can doing God’s will.

For us all, this involves a serious commitment to Jesus that will change our lives and our priorities. At times it might prevent us from pursuing things that would seem the best way forward. We show that we are true members of God’s family when we do the will of God.

But what of Jesus and his own family – his mother, Mary, and his step-brothers?

Mary, his Mother, who was told by the angel about Jesus’ divine nature, who bore him and raised him. As a mother, by instinct she would always care for him, and like all mothers, worry about him. He was, after all, on a journey that inevitably led to Jerusalem and the cross. Mary was right to be worried for him.

We read of Mary’s presence at his crucifixion, but his stepbrothers were not, although his half brother, James, went on to have a strong faith after Jesus’ resurrection. He was a leader of the church in Jerusalem and wrote the Book of James.

We can have no doubt Jesus loved his family, and he respected the concept of the family, but he also knew he had a mission that transcended traditional family ties. One that was to involve everyone, Jew and Gentile, no matter how close they may feel to Jesus, no matter how they were brought up.

For the early church for whom Mark was writing his gospel, who were being persecuted and who felt threatened, this special relationship with Jesus removed all family, racial, social and gender restrictions, creating a membership of a new family based on faith and a response to God through Jesus. They were being challenged to let go of their old ways and ties, and to embrace a new life in Him.

When I lived in Worcestershire, I had some really good friends, an elderly Christian couple who treated me really well. I’d often pop down the road to their place and put the world to rights with them over a cuppa and some cake; it would invariably turn into a meal with them, too.

I felt they were really fond of me and treated me almost like a son, and I treated them as almost like parents. Then one time I was going to visit and they said it would be better another time, as they had their son and his wife visiting, together with their grandchildren. It wasn’t unreasonable at all, but do you know, I am ashamed to admit that I felt just a little bit jealous, a bit excluded…

It was a reminder that no matter how close we had become, I was not family, and never would be.

Of course, rationally, I understood, and would have probably said the same thing myself in the situation. But it was a reminder that family ties can be a form of exclusion. If you are not in, you’re out!

For all of us, this gospel passage can be a source of joy. We are offered a place in Jesus’ family—not as a friend or associate, but as family members. The passage offers us a great privilege, but also a great responsibility: to allow the Holy Spirit to change us and make us doers of God's will – and if we are not in, we’re out. **Amen**

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by Ron**

God our refuge and strength, as we remember those who faced danger and death in Normandy,  
eighty years ago, grant us courage to pursue what is right, the will to work with others, and strength to overcome tyranny and oppression, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

O God, we pray for all the children of Palestine and Israel and in every country of the world. We pray for Muslims, Jews and Christians that we will draw on the best of our traditions to guide us away from words and acts of division and discrimination so that everyone may be free to live in safety. Protect the vulnerable, strengthen the fearful and comfort the grieving.  
In Jesus Christ, our Lord.

***Lord in your mercy Hear our prayer.***

God of life, we praise you for the beauty of creation, its richness and variety; yet, through greed and ignorance, we scar your world with plastic waste and throw so much away. Make us more like Jesus, treading gently on our common home, and breathe your Spirit on us, that we may care more deeply for your Earth. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

***Lord in your mercy Hear our prayer.***

Almighty and merciful God, whose Son became a refugee and had no place to call his own; look with mercy on those who today are fleeing from danger, homeless and hungry. Bless those who work to bring them relief; inspire generosity and compassion in all our hearts; and guide the nations of the world towards that day when all will rejoice in your Kingdom of justice and of peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

***Lord in your mercy Hear our prayer.***

Almighty God, we thank you for all people who help our local community to run smoothly. Bless our neighbours and strengthen those who are working in your name to bring healing and comfort to those in need. We pray for the General Election, which will be held on 4 July, and ask that all those who are elected as MPs will seek to serve all people in their constituencies. Amen

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**