

June 10, 2018. Third Sunday after Pentecost. Mark 3:20-21, 31-35

Blood is thicker than water. What does the proverb mean? Just as blood is thicker than water, family is more important than our other relationships. For example, a bride is preparing for her wedding and she has to decide who will be her maid of honor. She's got a sister that she gets along with occasionally, but most of the time they fight like cats and dogs. Then she's got her best-friend-forever whom she might rather have as her maid of honor, but she doesn't know how much drama her preferred choice will cause. What is mom's advice? Blood is thicker than water. It's probably better to pick your sister. You might fight, but she's family after all, and she will always be your sister. Blood is thicker than water.

I think we can generally agree with this proverb. Family is very important, and in most cases might be more important than our friends. But then there's situations when family can be the worst thing for us. Sometimes the advice or pressure that comes from the ones closest to us can be the most detrimental to our spiritual lives. Our Gospel reading today shows us one of those times when family must not be listened to. Jesus' own family comes to hinder him from his gospel work. But Jesus gives us the answer to the question of what is more important, earthly family or spiritual family. He shows us something that is thicker even than the bond of blood relatives.

Faith is thicker than blood.

Jesus had been preaching to many people in the region of Galilee, which is a few days journey to the north of Jerusalem. Galilee is where he spent a large part of his 3-year ministry. One of the cities in that region was Capernaum, which served as Jesus' home base during this time. Large crowds had been coming to Jesus, and he had healed many people from diseases and evil spirits. When word of this spread, more and more people kept coming to Jesus, pushing to get closer and closer to him. One day, Jesus and the disciples had entered a house to have a meal and to rest. But again, a crowd gathered around them so that they weren't even able to eat.

Word got back to Jesus' family that he was in town, and all the people were crowding around him. A few chapters later in Mark 6, Jesus' 4 brothers are named and we're also told he had sisters. When his family members heard about his preaching and the crowds, they came to take charge of him. But this wasn't some kind of family rescue to help him get away from the crowd. The reason they came doesn't seem to be some kind of genuine concern for his health and well-being. The word for "take charge of" has the idea of "seizing or restraining" and oftentimes even means to "arrest." This is kind of like when the wrong groomsman gets a hold of the microphone at a wedding reception and needs to be escorted off the stage.

We are told exactly what Jesus' family said about him. "He is out of his mind!" He's beside himself! He's lost his senses. They wanted to spare themselves some embarrassment and get their weird black-sheep brother out of the limelight. He thinks he's the Messiah for crying out loud.

This isn't the only place where we hear about these unbelieving brothers. In the Gospel of John, there's an occasion where these brothers are ridiculing Jesus, telling him to go out in the desert and do some miracles so everyone can see him. They're basically saying, "If you want to be famous, you have to show yourself to the world. Go ahead, Jesus, prove you're the Messiah." Then it says very clearly, "Even his own brothers did not believe in him."

Back to our text, now we're told that Jesus' mother and brothers arrive, but they can't even get close because the crowd is so thick. So, they send someone in to summon him. An interesting question is, "What is his mother Mary's role in this?" Is she just there with the brothers? Does she share their opinion that Jesus has gone too far? The somewhat unsatisfying answer is—we aren't told specifically what her role in this was. There's nothing absolute that tells us she shared the brothers' unbelief, but perhaps it's not out of the question. There were certainly other times where she didn't understand the work Jesus was doing. In any case, the family is trying to summon him outside, trying to get him off to the side so they can get him to come to his senses.

When the crowd informed Jesus that his mother and brothers were there looking for him, his response certainly was not what they were expecting. "Who are my mother and brothers?" Jesus seems to embed the law right into his question. Without even seeing them, he indicates that their intentions to see him are not appropriate. Their attempt to summon him and take charge of him is working against his task to do the will of God, to reveal himself as Messiah.

This was never the way a family was supposed to work. God had created the family to love and serve and support one another, not to work against God. But as we saw in our Old Testament reading, from the moment Adam and Eve ate the fruit God had forbidden, the family relationship was destroyed by sin. Husband and wife caused each other to sin against God's will and blamed each other for it. Now even in the family of Jesus, sin corroded the family bond as Jesus' brothers tried to turn him away from his work as Messiah. The family pressure still works against God to this day. When the holidays come around, even the commercials will tell you, "Holidays are about family. Family is the most important thing!" Then the pressure is on—"This is the only time our whole family can get together with

each other, so we're not going to worry about going to church, because family is important!" Or if they do all come to church, things can get even more interesting. "When the whole family is together, little doctrinal things shouldn't separate us. We should be able to all take communion together, and all pray together, because we are all a family." The pressure is real, it's close to home, it causes rifts, and it pulls us away from God. The easy thing might be to just give in, concede, let them have their way and go with the flow. But usually the easy way is not God's way. Usually the easy way is the sinful way that demolishes the bond with God our Father.

What was the startling question Jesus asked again? "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Just because they're my own blood doesn't mean they're really my family. And what was the answer to his own question? He looked at those who were seated around him, those who had been hearing his word, and he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" Imagine that moment! Jesus looks at them and essentially says, "You are my true family!" But he even gets more specific, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." Each one of you who does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Blood might be thicker than water but blood isn't thicker than everything. Family is not the most important thing.

Doing the will of God is the most important thing. And let's not get the wrong idea here. Don't think of doing God's will as if its performing good works, as if that is what makes us part of Jesus' family. No one but Jesus can truly meet God's demands and do his will. But Jesus tells us on another occasion what he means by doing God's will, doing the works God requires. "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." To do the will of God and to carry out his work is to believe in Jesus Christ the Savior. This is not something we accomplish by our own will, but this is the gift of faith granted by the Holy Spirit.

There is something thicker even than blood. It's the bond of faith, it's belief that Jesus is who he says he is, the Savior from sin! Through this faith, Jesus makes you his spiritual family. He proved exactly how far his love for you as brothers and sisters extends—even to death on a cross to take your sins away. By doing so he restored the bond between you and your heavenly Father- a bond that lasts to eternal life. The bond of spiritual family is far stronger than any earthly family. **Faith is thicker than blood.**

Each of you here this day has come to see God's will carried out. We have gathered to proclaim Jesus our Savior and put our trust in him. That makes each of you the spiritual brother or sister or mother to Jesus. And if you're that to Jesus, then you certainly are brothers and sisters and mothers to each other! You have a spiritual family gathered here that does the will of

God, and that bond with Jesus and each other is a bond that lasts to eternity. Maybe you've never felt close with your family; the pressure was too much or you were the odd one out. You have a family gathered here today, that is bonded together by the blood of Jesus. This family does God's will—believing in the Savior he has sent. This family does God's will by putting his commands into practice and prioritizing his word.

Your own earthly family might put the pressure on you to skip church, to compromise the truth, to not get so bent out of shape about little things. The reality is, you might have to miss a family gathering. You might not be in every family photo album. You might get blamed for making everything uncomfortable. So be it. Your stand is upon God's will found in his word! God's will is more important than family sensitivities. Even if you wind up hurt and alienated, your family of believers lives here in God's house, gathered around Jesus and his word. Your family here shows love to each other by following God's word, even down to the little things. They'll be here to comfort you and care for you.

And who knows? Maybe your witness to the truth and your stand on God's word is exactly what God uses to turn your earthly family members into the family of God. When Jesus' family came to seize him in unbelief, his goal wasn't to drive them away or cause strife. He wanted his blood family also to be his spiritual family. He wasn't worried about the bond of their earthly relationship; his goal was that they be his eternal family through faith.

Towards the end of the Bible, there are two books written by men who describe themselves as servants of Jesus Christ. Their names are James and Jude. These are two of the brothers of Jesus. Two of the same ones who came to seize him because they thought he was out of his mind. What grace our God shows! These two skeptics, these ridiculers, were brought to faith. They were even used as tools of the Holy Spirit to write down part of God's word. God delights to show mercy, he longs for more to be part of his true family. He has planned from eternity that you be born into the exact family you were born. He has placed you there among your family to do his will, to believe in his Son, and to be a witness to the knowledge of truth which leads to salvation. Amen