**FAMILY TIES **

Mark 3:20-35

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Several summers ago, while on vacation; I noticed a small white wooden sign in front of someone’s vacation rental that read; "Friend’s welcome, relatives by appointment only." Oh boy! That got my attention as it stated an often-unspoken truth; friends are sometimes easier to deal with than family.

When I read this text and thought about family, and family dynamics, just in name alone, I thought about the popular T.V. series; “Family Ties”, staring Michael J. Fox. Well, come to find out, although I didn’t really think about it at the time; most of the humor of the series focused on the cultural divide during the 1980s when the younger generation rejected the [counterculture of the 1960s](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counterculture_of_the_1960s), (you know the hippie generation); and embraced the materialism and conservative politics which came to define the ‘80s. Families are complex organisms. Look at the diversity within this one family; Alex, the oldest, is a conservative "Young Republican." Mallory, is an a-political, materialistic young woman (in contrast to her [feminist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second-wave_feminism) mother.) The younger daughter; Jennifer, is an athletic tomboy who shares her parents’ values and just wants to be a “normal kid.” And their fourth and youngest child; Andy, is the apple of older brother Alex’s eye, who tries to mold him in his conservative image.

Family; just what is it? The contrast, in that “made for TV” family, seems tame, as I consider the controversies families are up against these days. Wear a mask, don’t wear a mask, get the vax, don’t get the vax, abortion, transgenderism, homosexuality etc. In fact, I read just the other day that Democrats and Conservatives have a lot in common but they only argue about (and you only hear about) the things they disagree on. (I believe it!) I hear stories every day of the rifts these issues cause between friends, loved ones and family. And I am no exception. If this hits home for me, it most certainly must affect some of you.

Well, if you are looking for a picture-perfect snapshot of the well-adjusted family from the Bible; I’m going to encourage you to look elsewhere. Even Jesus' family isn’t what we would expect from a Lord and Savior. Today’s text suggests that Jesus' relationship with his mother was rather strained and there were similar tensions between he and his siblings, as well. Did you catch that they called him crazy? No one likes to be called crazy.

Today’s gospel lesson from Mark says: "When his family heard what was happening, they came to take control of him. They were saying, 'He's out of his mind!'" (New International Version). Yet, many scholars have a hard time with this text, due to the fact that this is not an easy text to reconcile. Who wants to admit their Savior was called crazy? In fact: the King James Version totally removes Jesus' family from the scene, saying: "And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him.'" The New Revised Standard Version puts the disparagement of Jesus, in the mouths of others, saying: "When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.'" In contrast to Mark; the authors of the other Gospels Matthew and Luke; (whose books were written after the Gospel of Mark) omit from their narratives any suggestion that Jesus' family thought he was crazy.

So, who among you is willing to admit that your family thinks you are a little batty, or can you at least admit you are the “black sheep” in your family? Well, I for one will admit it. I have always been stubborn (I used to think that was a bad thing, now I think it has been my saving grace.) I have always taken the road-less-traveled, and marched to the beat of my own drum. Although I love my family and I love people, being popular and “fitting-in” has never been a high-priority.

Let’s talk about our Old Testament reading from 1st Samuel for a minute. This is a great example of how selling out for popularity can wind you up with nothing short of a hot mess. Have you ever noticed how the pendulum swings in life? It’s been that way for a long time and there is a reason for this. Israel was on the heels of a great victory, and yet now they are on the precipice of defeat. It seems that in the best of times, we think that we don’t need God, so we tend to lean on trusting our own plan, thus abandoning our faith. This creates a generation with a sense of entitlement, greed and selfishness. Well, this never lasts and ultimately leads to the bottom falling out. It’s when we are at the bottom, penniless, oppressed and forgotten that we reach out and turn our hearts to God. So, the moral of that story is; be forewarned; when you let a little victory creep into your life...

Back to the nation of Israel; of course, their problem (and usually ours) doesn’t begin on the national level. Even then, the failure started in the home. You see in today’s text, Samuel is old. Just a short few verses, and a short few years ago; Samuel traveled around the land of Israel as an interpreter of Jewish law. Now this circuit rider is retired and he’s turned his duties of judging (that he’s so faithfully fulfilled) – over to his heirs; his sons; Joel and Abijah. (Like abide.) They turn out to be a huge disappointment. They were all about money and power, and they exploited their position for personal gain, and in the end – they royally fail. So, the Israelites turn back to Samuel, who was the last - and probably the best of Israel’s judges. Yes, in the midst of the failures of his sons, all the people could think about was how well Samuel had served them. So, they seek him out with one last request; they request; a King.

You see, they no longer wanted to be a covenant people with God; honoring God with their whole lives. I mean; everyone else had a King – so why shouldn’t they have one? Maybe things would be better if they had a King. (Think of it; everyone else has socialized medicine why shouldn’t we?) Just like Adam and Eve, choosing the knowledge of good and evil rather than a relationship with the creator of the universe. The Israelites demand new governance. And Samuel’s response was something like: “you want what?”

What a huge disappointment. Only one chapter back, we learn that, under Samuel’s leadership, the people were called to put away their idols and to turn to God so that they would be saved from the Philistines, and when they comply, God did just that - he saved them. But already they have turned away. Samuel knows that the people don’t need a king. They already have one, their Creator God – you know the one who liberated their ancestors from Egyptian slavery. So, Samuel (holds up finger), presses the send button and starts a new chat with God. Samuel prays. And he listens. And Samuel gets a clear response. God doesn’t respond with famine or fires or harsh words. No, just as God listened when the people cried out while wandering in the wilderness, God hears the prophet now. The people have rejected God at every turn. But still they feel entitled enough to dare ask for divine favors. They just want to be like everybody else - win a war, lose the next. Be enslaved, then enslave those you conquer. A vicious cycle.

Yet even so, God is faithful. God is willing to give his people everything they want, but God wants them to know exactly what they are getting into. So, God instructs Samuel to; “Warn them.” So, Samuel warns them. He tells them; “This leader you’re asking for will build a military to keep your children at war. They will take and use your daughters for their pleasure. You won’t own anything. They will take away your work, land and animals to secure their affluence with their friends and supporters. You will be their slaves! And when the burden is too great – (and it will be) - and you cry out to God for relief, none will come. Do you hear me? None will come, because you have chosen this king; this bondage for yourselves.”

Yes, you see there is always a price to pay for giving up your God given freedoms and thinking for yourself – in exchange for popularity and fitting in. It might feel uncomfortable standing alone in your truth and being the black sheep, but there is an even greater long-term price to pay, for not listening to God. But God is faithful – if you want to fit in and be taken care of and just be comfortable; then God will give you a king.

Back to Jesus. Jesus came, to renew God’s covenant with his people, to set them free from their bondage, and all he gets is harassed by the rumor mills of the crowd, demonized by the ideology of the scribes, and annoyed by the pressure of family. I think he is very upset with his family for trying to restrain him and calling him crazy – in public. And he has had enough. He knows, and says; “when a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.” And yet he says; “no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man.” And you just tried; so, now you are forcing me to choose. You know the saying “with friends like that, who needs enemies?” He knew; in order to keep his mission strong, he must part ways with anyone who is against his mission – even if it is his biological family. He didn’t say; “I’m sorry, I’ll change. Let’s do lunch and talk about this misunderstanding. Can’t we try to get along.” No, he drew a line – I am about my Father’s business.

His mission (and ours) is to always do the will of the Father – the “right” thing. And yet that seems to be what got him in trouble every time and led to his crucifixion. No matter what; his right, always seemed very wrongto his very vocal critics. Because he’s “going against their flow” (Jewish law), so they deem him crazy. What do you do when the good you do is called bad? How do you continue to “press on” when everyone mocks and maligns you?

It’s tough standing on your own. It’s painful to watch friends and family turn against you for your values. Here, Jesus came to love, heal, and forgive, but, his truth-telling made them uncomfortable. It is no wonder the Apostle Paul said to not get weary in doing good. Such truth and good doing is not always appreciated. Many people can’t handle it. It’s inconvenient! And in order to tame it, we malign it, or we seek to kill the messenger.

But Jesus was not crazy. And so, I conclude with the gospel from Mark; After all was said and done, a crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” 33And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34And looking at those who sat around him, his disciples; those who were still listening, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 35Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” He made it perfectly clear who he considered family.

We don’t need a King, as soon as we give up our God given freedoms, freedoms to choose who we follow, how we live, what we put into our bodies - we are nothing more than slaves.

Jesus was free – free to choose his family. We may not understand nor agree with our family members (or friends) today, but rather than malign them – perhaps inquire of their hearts and ask why do they think that way? What makes them tick? And if we can’t see eye to eye move along. Shake the dust off your sandals. Family – may not be blood related nor look alike but at their core they have the same values. Just look at Winnie the Pooh and Tigger and Eeyore on our bulletin cover, on the surface they seem to have nothing in common – and yet they are family – we are family. Jesus came to heal, love and forgive. That is our mission too.

Let us pray: Unlike earthly kings, you, O Lord, are ever steadfast and faithful. You sent us your Son, Jesus the Christ, to rule over us, not as a tyrant, but as a gentle shepherd. Keep us united and strong in faith, that we may always know your presence in our lives. You call us to be your friends and to make friends of others – more even, to recognize in them our brothers and sisters, your family in Christ. So, we pray for ourselves and for the world and its people: We pray for all people where deep divisions run. Lord, help your people to be your friends and to make friends – as your family in Christ. We pray for our communities where there are many differences in thoughts and creed, but help your people to look at their hearts; to listen well to each other that we may learn to live together knowing that though different we are your family in Christ. We pray for our own families where we know growing up is difficult, where harsh words spoken in anger are not easily taken back, and hurtful or thoughtless actions are endangering relationships. Lord, empower your children to be patient, slow to anger and to become wise in their speaking and acting as your family in Christ. And yet when all else fails may we be strong enough to walk away so that your Kingdom may come.

Invocation: Merciful and loving God, you call us out of our dark places, offering us the grace of new life. When we see nothing but hopelessness, you surprise us with the breath of your spirit. Call us out of our complacency and routines, set us free from our self-imposed bonds, and fill us with your spirit of life, compassion, and peace as we worship and praise you this morning. In Jesus name we pray – **Amen**

 **Rev. Jil Jennewein**

Benediction: Go into the world with assurance, hope and promise. You are the family of God.