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The Rev. Robin Teasley

*The crowd came together again, so that Jesus and his disciples could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.*

*"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."*

*Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Mark 30:20-35*

Whenever things going on in the world appear to be getting out of hand, people will sometimes lament a loss of traditional family values. As Christians, we might complain that families are no longer following the teachings in the Bible. But if we look more closely, there is much in scripture that reveals a huge amount of family dysfunction! These stories are not usually the ones included in our lectionary, so you may not be familiar with them. But even those that *are* included, show us that families are far from perfect. Cain and Abel competed with one another until Cain, in his jealousy and anger, killed his brother. Abraham pretended his wife Sarah was his sister in order to save his own skin. Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup. Jacob tricked his father and his father-in-law. Joseph's jealous brothers sold him to passing Ishmaelite traders. And this all happens in Genesis! We can see family dysfunction happening throughout the Hebrew scriptures, but if you think it ends there, you are mistaken.

So much of what the Apostle Paul writes to the earliest Church communities is in response to dysfunction in their family of faith, and in today's Gospel we see some disturbing dysfunction in Jesus' own earthly family and even Jesus appears to be behaving badly!

As is typical in Mark's Gospel, life has been clipping along at a fast pace. Jesus has been casting out demons right and left, healing the sick, appointing the twelve apostles, and he was continually surrounded by crowds. In today's reading the crowd is so imposing that they could not even find time to eat. Jesus was tired, hungry, and in need of some "alone" time! On top of that the scribes have caught up with Jesus and are accusing him of being associated with Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons. And then, just when Jesus was up to his neck in daily stress, pressure from work, and the relentless demands of the crowd, his family shows up to *restrain* him. The scripture here is polite. The word *restrain* would be more accurately translated as "seized, grabbed, or arrested." Jesus' family was getting in his business! The truth is, they thought he was out of his mind.

Jesus seemed to turn his back on his family; something that was just not done in that time and culture. Don't you know his family was saying, "What is wrong with him? We raised him better than that!" Because family was everything. Who you were, what you did for a living, who you married; your entire relationship to God and to society were defined by your family.

I'm guessing that many of us can relate; maybe we've come from families that have placed great expectations upon us. Expectations that sometimes have been too restricting or even damaging. We see families in strife over things like politics, religion, money, or gender. Families breaking apart when a member is unaccepted because of who they love or how they live their life – unaccepted because of who they are.

In the crowd that day, in that moment of tense confrontation, Jesus redefined for all time the meaning of family. It might have been painful for his family to hear, just as it can be painful when we must be honest with our own family when they are restraining us from becoming who we are meant to be.

It's important to note that Jesus does not reject the institution of family or his own family. What he does is open up the meaning of family. Jesus expands and re-frames the idea of family. Now we are no longer defined by who our ancestors were, what our past looks like, or how many ways we have messed up. Jesus is calling us to look beyond our preconceived idea of family as a self-contained, all controlling unit. In that moment, Jesus was forming a family of faith, Jesus was forming the church, the family of God.

Looking around at the crowd of misfits, mistaken scribes, the unclean on the margins, the disciples, and even his biological family, Jesus declared that true family is made up of those who do the will of God. Jesus knew from his human experience that families are *not* perfect. They will not always understand us, they make mistakes, and they may even hinder or harm us at times.

Jesus challenges our definition of family. God calls us beyond our self-focused households, giving us the means of growing in faith and love through the gift of brothers and sisters we might otherwise have ignored.

Our church family is not perfect either, and even in the church, there will be dissent. Jesus warns us that houses and kingdoms that are divided will not stand, and this applies to churches as well. It is work, hard work, to do the will of God. It gets uncomfortable at times; assumptions are made, and expectations might be challenged or left unmet. All of that is why our work as people of faith depends, not upon our own individual preferences, but upon doing the will of God.

Jesus is opening our eyes to the kingdom of God and to God's will for all of creation.

Noted Christian author Rachel Held Evans described it this way, "This is what God's kingdom is like: a bunch of outcasts and oddballs gathered at a table, not because they are rich or worthy or good, but because they are hungry, because they said yes. And there's always room for more." The good news is that we are invited to become part of a larger family, the family of God. This family, which we call the Church, is made up of friends and families of all kinds who make a conscious decision to work together to do the will of God.

Our ancestors in the faith were not perfect, and yet they were forgiven, loved, and are part of our salvation history. And God's promises hold true for us too. Even now, God is calling us to more, calling us to hope, healing, and hospitality in a world that needs these gifts we have to offer. We may not always agree with one another about the best way to move forward as people of faith, but together we will focus on doing the will of God and in doing that, our family will remain strong. Amen.