



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

April 29, 2018

"All in the Family" - Hope Restored Sermon Series

The Rev. Tim Shaw

In today's Scripture reading I am going to rewind the text all the way back to the verses Chris Pan spoke on two weeks ago. That's going to help today's text make sense. I'm also going to leap over the part of this passage Pastor Dan spoke on last Sunday. If you want to learn more about "The Unforgivable Sin", then I'd encourage you to listen to Dan's sermon.

Here are selected verses from Mark 3:19-35. *"Then (Jesus) went home; ²⁰ and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ When His family heard it, they went out to restrain Him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons He casts out demons."*

Let's jump to verse 31...

Mark 3:31 *"Then His mother and His brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to Him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." ³³ And He replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around Him, He said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will*

of God is my brother and sister and mother."

I was preaching in Berkeley on the Sunday of the Oakland Hills fire that ended up destroying 3,000 homes. 75 people in our church in Berkeley lost their homes that day. As I was preaching, I began to notice an amber glow begin to surround the sanctuary which has glass walls on three sides of the building. I've listen to a lot of sermons. I've delivered quite a few myself and I've rarely seen someone walk up to the pastor while they are still in the pulpit and interrupt them. It happened to me that morning.

One of the ushers came up to me in the middle of my talk, leaned in and told me, "You should tell people that if they live in the Oakland or Berkeley Hills, they should probably leave right now because those neighborhoods are either on fire or soon will be." What unfolded in the next few hours, days and weeks was both heart-breaking and remarkable. I saw a community come together to love and care for a group of people who had lost all or most of their physical possessions.

That was the first time I was the interim senior pastor for First Presbyterian Berkeley. I was just six years out of seminary. The next Sunday our church gathered once again to worship God. This time

we gathered in the aftermath of one of the greatest tragedies to hit the East Bay in a very long time. This time, I was the one who suddenly interrupted the worship service. We had changed the order of worship completely from what had already been planned. New bulletins were printed and we had told everyone about the changes except one person, the organist.

He fired up the First Presbyterian massive Ruffatti pipe organ, and started playing the original hymn. We started singing the hymn printed in the bulletin. Sometimes you can get away with that. You can sing the words to one hymn to the tune of another. I turned to the minister of music who was standing next to me and asked him, "Is this going to work?" He simply said, "No way." So this time, I had to stop the service and make a decision. I said to the congregation, "We either have to sing the song he's playing or he's going to have to play the song we were singing." It ended up being the comic relief many of us needed.

In this passage from Mark 3, Jesus gets interrupted while He's preaching. He's inside a house that is crammed with people who are eagerly listening to Him. All of a sudden, someone, probably standing in the doorway has someone from Jesus' family tap Him on the shoulder.

“Hey, sorry man, but I’m one of Jesus’ brothers. His brothers and sisters and I are here with Jesus’ mom, Mary (she probably waves a sheepish hello). Uhhh, we need to talk to Jesus, right now. Could you pass the word up to Him and ask Him to come out and talk with us?”

To be honest, I find this a little strange. Why didn’t His family just wait until He was finished talking? Why interrupt Him and cause this disturbance? The fact that they were willing to do this shows how anxious they were about what Jesus was doing and saying. They’d come all the way from Nazareth to Capernaum, as a group, to take Jesus home because they were concerned that what they’d been hearing was true. He’d lost His mind.

I remember the time two of my sisters, one of their husbands, four nieces and nephews and I all showed up at my mom’s primary care physician’s office. We did that because we wanted to encourage him to abandon his pain management strategy and sign off on hip replacement surgery for my mom. It’s a big deal when eight people from one family show up to have a chat with you. The doctor did sign off on the surgery which was the best thing he could have done.

Remember what Chris Pan taught us a couple of weeks ago, After Jesus selected his band of disciples He went home and a huge crowd followed Him. That crowd of people made all sorts of demands on Jesus. They filled up His life so completely that he was not able to even find time to eat. Even though He was attracting large crowds, the word on the street among some people was that Jesus was out of His mind. So, His family goes to restrain Him.

It’s a very forceful word that is used in verse 21. His family went to seize Jesus and take Him into custody for His own good. So, while Jesus is speaking, the word is passed through the crowd and finally reaches Jesus. Someone walks up to Jesus and says, “Sorry to interrupt, but your family is outside and they need to talk to you right now.” That is an awkward moment, At that point in Jesus’ talk if everyone had not been listening intently, they were now. And Jesus’ response does not help His reputation on the streets.

Jesus says: “*Who are my mother and my brothers?*” What? Once again Jesus says something unexpected. If we were able to freeze that moment and we had the ability to see thought bubbles above the heads of the people inside the house, here’s what I think most of those thought bubbles would say: “Uhh, who are Your mother and brothers? Aren’t the people who are outside the house, aren’t they Your family?”

Maybe He has lost His mind.

It is hard to underestimate how scandalous what Jesus did here was. For many living in the west it is difficult for us to appreciate how upsetting Jesus’ response must have been. For many United States families it is not unusual at all for family members to be spread out all across the country and even around the world. It is not unusual at all for many family members to get together only at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

We go off to school, we make deep friendships while we’re there, we move to a new city for our first job and put down our roots. We find a church we like, we make new friends and sometimes those people become closer to us than our own family members. We start

sharing our lives with these new friends and only occasionally connect with the members of our family. That is the experience of many in our country, though here in Hawai’i, the connection to family goes much deeper than it tends to with many families living on the mainland.

Jesus’ culture was much closer to the culture of Hawai’i and Asia, where the connection to family is very important, deep and defining. The fact that He asks the question, “So, who are My mother and My brothers and sisters?” especially when the crowd just learned that His family, including His mother, are standing outside, would have been shocking to the people who heard Him say it. Did He not care about offending his family? This had the potential to be extremely embarrassing to them and might just confirm what they had heard others say. “He has lost his mind.”

As Chris Pan pointed out a few weeks ago, lots of things that Jesus says, at first blush, seem crazy, unrealistic, maybe unwise. He sometimes says things that are awkward, seemingly out of touch, even dangerous. Is He insane? In His cultural context, His response to his family seems unhinged, but it is precisely at moments like this that we need to hang in there with Jesus and dig a little deeper into the meaning of His words.

Here is what I think Jesus is doing. It’s something He’d been doing for a long time. In this encounter with His family members, He is once again redefining who and what must come first in the life of His disciples. He’d been redefining these priorities from before His public ministry began. It started back when He was just a boy.

It's fascinated me for a long time that we have so little information about Jesus' life prior to His baptism in the Jordan River. We know something about His miraculous birth and the dramatic events that lead up to it. We know very little about what happens in His life until we meet Jesus again at about the age of 30.

We can surmise that He worked as a carpenter with His earthly dad Joseph, other than that, we don't know much. The only story we have in the gospels is what I like to call Jesus' "Home Alone" story when His parents accidentally left Jesus in Jerusalem when He was around 12 years old.

Do you recognize this guy (showed picture of Kevin McCallister putting on aftershave lotion). Anyone remember his name? (Kevin McCallister). Here's a picture of his mom (showed picture of the mom) the moment she realizes that in the chaos of moving a large family, they'd lost track of their youngest child. They'd left him home alone (show the slide with the Home Alone logo).

Let's watch the moment Kevin's mom realizes that they'd left him at home.

If you are a parent, one of the most terrifying moments you can have is to lose track of one of your little children. When He was 12 or 13, Jesus' family went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and when it was over they headed back to Nazareth. They travelled to Jerusalem and back as an ohana. There were lots of kids, lots of aunties and uncles. So, I can understand how Mary and Joseph misplaced Jesus in the city.

Jesus was probably a pretty reliable middle schooler. He had always done what His parents

asked Him to do. They could count on Him to keep his word, be where He was supposed to be, and do what He was supposed to do. So, I can imagine that when Mary and Joseph left the city with all their other kids in the company of their larger family, they made some assumptions.

If Mary and Joseph were not traveling with each other, Mary probably thought, "Hmmm, I wonder where Jesus is. Oh, He's probably with Joseph." I can also imagine Joseph wondering the same thing and concluding He must be with Mary or one of their other family members. On the second day, Mary and Joseph apparently meet up and looked at each other and realized that they'd left Jesus in Jerusalem. Could you imagine what that felt like? They rush back to the city and eventually find Jesus in the Temple in deep conversation with the religious leaders.

Let's take a look at that amazing scene from Luke 2:46-51

46 After three days (Mary and Joseph) found (Jesus) in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." 49 He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand what he said to them. 51 Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

It took His parents three days to find their son. When they finally did find Him, they were probably out of their minds with anxiety. They must have been so relieved to find Him, but there might have been a few other emotions boiling inside them. The text says they were amazed, they were astonished when they saw Him in the Temple. That astonishment probably was the result of the fact that this seem so out of character for Jesus. How could He have treated them like this? That astonishment was also the result of what He was doing when they finally located Him.

He was sitting among the teachers of the Law, listening to them and asking them questions, and the people were amazed at this boy. They were amazed at His understanding and His answers to their questions. Little did they know who this twelve-year old boy actually was, and that realization of who He is will deepen here in the Temple and it will deepen in the story we're looking at from Mark 3.

Jesus' response to his mom's questions in the Temple would not have gone down well in the house I grew up in. Mary asked her son a straight-forward question. "Why have you treated us so poorly, so carelessly?" Jesus doesn't answer her question. Instead He asks her two of His own questions. "Why were you searching for me? Why didn't you know where I would be - I would be here in my Father's house (the Temple)."

That response would not have worked for me as gracious and understanding as my mom is and always has been. Let's say I was in high school and I stayed out after my curfew. Let's imagine I try to sneak into the house but see that the living room lights are on.

And there, sitting on the sofa are my parents. Let's say I try saying something like. "Hey, mom and dad, I know it's one o'clock in the morning but certainly you must have assumed that I would be with my friends doing the work of God's kingdom." That would not have worked. So what's going on here?

In that shocking response, Mary begins to realize something very important has changed. Maybe it has always been this way and she is just now beginning to consider the implications of Jesus' response to her. As prickly, as awkward as His response to Her is, He is telling her that there is a relationship that is more important than even the relationship He has with her. It is not a rejection of His family ties to His mom. It is a reordering of that relationship. There is a relationship that takes priority over every other relationship and that relationship is the one He has with God, His heavenly Father. That is, as psychologists might say, a differentiating moment for Jesus and his earthly mother and father.

As I think about what's happening in today's text from Mark 3, I wonder whether Mary thought about that day when she and Joseph found her young son in the Temple. I wonder whether she thought about what He had said to her that day as she and her other children waited outside that crowded house. She had held on to what Jesus said to her, as shocking as it was. Did she also think about what the angel had said to her when he announced Jesus' birth to her?

Now, as she and her other children stood outside that packed house; as they pleaded with Jesus to come out so they could take Him home, they heard Him say this to the crowd. Mark 3:33-35:

³³ And (Jesus) replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"
³⁴ And looking at those who sat around Him, He said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"
³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Did His family hear that and think, "Yep. He's lost it!" Or did they stop and wonder what the significance of His words might be? By saying this, Jesus did something that is really good news for you and me. He expanded the definition of family. It wasn't a rejection of his mom and His brothers and sisters, It wasn't a snub. It was an embrace of others outside His family, and that is fantastic news for all of us. We have been brought into Jesus' family because we have done the will of His Heavenly Father. We have said yes to His Son's invitation to trust Him. That is at the heart of what it looks like to do the will of God.

But make no mistake about it, Jesus is upsetting the cultural norms of His day with these words. What Jesus is doing here is revolutionary. He is reordering the world. Mark is calling his readers, both then and now, to reorder their world and put allegiance to Jesus first before every other commitment. Jesus calls us to do that because He knows that when we put Him first, every other alliance, every other relational commitment we have will be better when He is first. The good news of the gospel of Jesus is that because Jesus put His relationship with His Heavenly Father first, our lives, our futures, our wellbeing, were His priority.

Here's the challenge. Instead of getting our primary sense of who we are from Jesus, we seek that core identity from other loyalties, as important as those loyalties might be.

N.T. Wright says, "We substitute longstanding friendship, membership in the same group, tribe, family, club, party, social class or whatever it may be (to get that core identity). But the call to be 'around' Jesus, to listen to Him, even if 'those outside' think us crazy, is what matters."

Here are a few of the implications of what Jesus is saying to us. If we want to be the kind of friend who is loyal and supportive to others, be loyal to Jesus first. If you are a parent, the most important thing your children can know about you is that your first loyalty is to Jesus. If we want to be wise citizens of this great nation, then we first must be loyal to Jesus and not to our political party or to the nation itself. It is only if Jesus is first that any of these other relationships and communities will have a chance to thrive. That is the implication of what Jesus is saying.

Wherever Jesus and His gospel are proclaimed, people are presented with a choice. Who will be first? Will I put myself first? Will I put someone else or something else in my life first? Mark's call to his readers then and now is to stick with Jesus whatever the cost. Put Him first, above every other loyalty, and when we do, we will know how to be a friend, a citizen, a parent, a spouse, a worker, a boss, a pastor.

The world desperately needs to see people who are putting Jesus first.

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