

Mark 3:20-35

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."

You know, I always find it interesting at how headlines are made. Often it is not the author of the article who comes up with the headline. The same occurs with books. The author submits his or her article or manuscript and the publisher or the editor comes up with the headline or the title. The challenge that I often accept for myself is to actually read the article in the newspaper to see if the contents beyond the first paragraph truly reflect the headline.

Well, I was reading about a newspaper article that ran in a paper in Ohio. The headline read, "Plane With A Mind Of Its Own Crashes." Well, that deserves a read, I thought. From the headline, I had this vision of the pilot soaring high over the countryside having a discussion with his plane that disintegrated into an argument and then finally the plane, having had enough, took a short cut of its own devising, straight down.

Here is what really happened...A very experienced pilot was having mechanical problems in an old, vintage, single-engine plane over Urbana, Ohio. He decided to land at a nearby airport and, as he reached the end of the runway and turned the plane back and powered up the engine to head to the hanger area, the engine died. Being a vintage plane, the pilot got out to restart the engine by hand cranking the propeller. Maybe you can see where this is going, now.

He yanked down on the propeller, the engine roared to life, and started down the runway by itself. The flaps were still configured for landing, which meant they were configured for take off, which the plane did. About 90 minutes later at 12,000 feet the plane finally had enough and turned its nose straight down into a farmer's field. The moral of the story could be found in the headline. When we rely solely on our own minds, pilotless, although we may soar for a while, eventually things come to an unfortunate end.

There are a lot of great messages in of passages for today. Things like...the leadership of Israel when Samuel was in his old age demanding a ruler, or rulers, to replace God in their lives and being warned of the consequences.

Paul, telling the Church in Corinth when they were up against hard times to keep the faith for there are things that are unseen that will make all things new again.

Mark sharing a story about how Jesus, when he was out preaching his message of repentance, was accused of having lost his mind, or that a demon had taken him over. Even his family was out telling him to tone it down a bit. Or Mark telling everyone the fact that there is a sin that God will not or maybe even cannot forgive.

They are all important messages that deserve our attention and we will certainly get to each one at some point. But this morning I want us to look at the last verse of the Gospel passage. Mark ends this section with, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Well, there you go! Pretty straightforward. Whoever does God's will, will be grafted into God's family and, as a result, become brothers and sisters of Christ and each other. Go forth and do so!

But how do we know? How do we know what God's will is for the world and for each of us in the world? Well, the only way that I have found to know God's will is to strive to know God.

I don't know if you noticed something last week and this morning, but I'm pretty sure that you will from today forward. As I begin worship, I always issue an invitation. I invite each of us, and all of us, to "Draw Near to God." I make that invitation because it is the key to everything else. We must put our relationship with God above all other things, because it is in that relationship that God's will will be found. It is truly the only way to know God's will for our lives. There is no shortcut. And the good news is that God is not trying to keep it to himself. The life that it brings is the life that he desires for us. There is not a secret password or handshake needed. It is a gift that he will share when we draw near and listen.

But there is another benefit that comes along with the gift. By putting God above all other things, all other things are raised up. By putting all other things secondary to God, we actually increase their value. I know it sounds backwards but the reality is that, if we want to

love our families better, then love God more. If we want our connections with our neighbors to expand, then we need to deepen our connection to God. It is through our relationship with God that our relationships around us are transformed. Family is elevated. Friendship is elevated. Our love for our families and friends becomes tied to a deeper kind of love and, through that, they are no longer tied to a reciprocity of what is in it for me, but rather becomes based on what can I bring to it for them. Commerce is uplifted. Politics are remade. Society is made whole. All by putting God in his proper place and then drawing near.

This is where the leadership of Israel went wrong in their demand for a king as a replacement for God. When they relied on a human as their standard, all other relationships diminished to fit that model. The heavy demands of the king on the people. The struggle and division of the people, and among the people, in their effort to make their lives work. The desire for the power and the possessions that others had in order to find what society modeled as the things that bring meaning. Samuel warned them. He warned them that they would eventually become trapped in that lesser life without God, to the point where God would simply allow them to be who they had chosen to be. Draw near and know God and through that we can know God's will for our lives and find real joy and peace.

And we also come to know God's will by drawing near to each other in Godly love and service. When we embrace each other in Christ's name, God teaches us his will for creation. He shows us a joy, a societal joy, that is not, and cannot be, found elsewhere. He gives us a glimpse of the coming kingdom. He allows us to see lives transformed and made whole by his truth for the world.

It seems like a pretty simple statement by Mark at the end of a discussion of who Jesus says his family is. The reality is that Mark is telling us a profound truth for our existence. Draw near to God, embrace his will for our lives, embrace and serve each other through that relationship, and see the world for what it was meant to be.

C.S. Lewis said it like this, "There are only two kinds of people: those who say to God, "Thy will be done." And those who God finally says, "All right then, have it your way." Let us be the former, and through that be part of God's family.

Amen.