

Jim Gill

“God’s Family”

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1 Samuel 8:4-11, 16-20 Mark 3:20-35 2 Corinthians 4:13--5:

INTRODUCTION TO I Samuel 8:4-11; 16-20

Even though I was away last week I was still able to see photos of graduates walking across their respective stages. Congratulations to them all.

One in particular was noteworthy. Anne sent me pictures of the graduation ceremony at Baylor College of Medicine when J.J. Watt was presented with an honorary Doctorate in Humanities for his work raising money for Hurricane Harvey Relief. He set a goal of raising \$200,000 but didn’t meet it. He raised \$37,000,000! Anne said every student that walked across to get their diplomas stopped for a selfie with J.J.

In many communities we offer our graduates congratulations on a job well done — the emphasis for parents is on well, but we know the emphasis for the graduates is on done. Of course, at this time, the expectation is that we should pass on some words of wisdom. After all, graduation exercises are called commencements— beginnings. As graduates begin this next stage of life, they wonder what lies ahead. What should we say?

Here is one piece of advice that comes right out of the lectionary reading. The prophet Samuel says, "Be careful what you wish for ...you just might get it!"

The leaders of the nation came to Samuel with what was probably not an unreasonable request. They wanted a change in the way they were being governed. In years past, they had followed the lead of those judges whom God had appointed, of whom Samuel was held in highest regard. But now, these "judgeships" were being passed from father to son just as monarchies go from kings to princes. And, as is often the case, the current crop of Israelite "judge-princes" was not the best. In fact, Samuel's own sons, Joel and Abijah fell into that category. Under their administration, "justice" was no justice at all — it was for sale to the highest bidder. So the people came with their request. Hear the word of the Lord from I Samuel 8:4-11; 16-20

INTRODUCTION TO MARK 3:20-35

In this 3rd chapter of Mark Jesus has just appointed his 12 disciples. What happens next? The religious leaders begin claiming that Jesus is possessed by Satan. Hear what happens when Jesus responds to their accusations from Mark 3:20-35

Dr. Eugene Brice tells a story about a minister who returned to visit a church he had once served. He ran into Bill, who had been an elder and leader in the church, but who wasn't around anymore. The pastor asked, "Bill, what happened? You used to be there every time the doors opened."

"Well, Pastor," said Bill, "a difference of opinion arose in the church. Some of us couldn't accept the final decision and we established a church of our own."

"Is that where you worship now?" asked the pastor.

"No," answered Bill, "we found that there, too, the people were not faithful and a small group of us began meeting in a rented hall at night."

"Has that proven satisfactory?" asked the minister.

"No, I can't say that it has," Bill responded. "Satan was active even in that fellowship, so my wife and I withdrew and began to worship on Sunday at home by ourselves."

"Then at last you have found inner peace?" asked the pastor.

"No, I'm afraid we haven't," said Bill. "Even my wife began to develop ideas I was not comfortable with, so now she worships in the northeast corner of the living room, and I am in the southwest." 1

Jesus said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." Abraham Lincoln wasn't the first to say it.

Jill Duffield in her weekly Looking Into the Lectionary column writes,

"I wonder what the just appointed 12 disciples think of this encounter. The crowd is so boisterous, big and needy that eating in Jesus' own home isn't an option. The scribes say Jesus is ruled by the ruler of the demons. Jesus launches into a lecture about Satan and a house divided and tying up the strong man when breaking into a house. Oh and there's that bit about all sins being forgivable except for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Jesus' family seeks to restrain him. When Jesus is told his family is outside asking for him, he replies: "Here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Jesus' family is concerned about him. Reports have been coming that make them think he might be losing his mind. They come to take him away, back to the family fold for protection and rest and recovery. Jesus has been performing remarkable healings. Great crowds have gathered, and everyone is talking about him. He was so busy there was not even time to eat. The scribes were spewing fake news saying that Jesus' power to heal comes from demons. You and I know that it is not a demon that drives Jesus, but the Spirit of God. Apparently, his family didn't know. It is sad that his mother and brothers, who should be closest to him, do not understand.

This complex story with a story in the middle reveals a great deal about who Jesus is and what he has come to do. Jesus' declaration about the binding of the strong man and who is kin to him and makes explicit that he has come to bring about a whole new order of connection, loyalty and power. No more kings, Samuel.

Jesus' mission is subversive and unexpected as a thief in the night. The established rules for who is in and who is out don't apply any more. Jesus comes to bind up the forces of evil and take over the house and all that is within it. Those who join him in fulfilling this divine mission - they are his family. Those who don't? Well, they will be outsiders, looking in until they get with his program and join what Jesus is doing.

Jesus offends those closest to him, those with the greatest power to hurt him and even, I suspect some in the crowd and the newly appointed disciples as well. Jesus offends because he upends everything they've ever thought sacred: family, religion, civility,

established order, home, church, country. Jesus calls us to give up all the loyalties that in comparison to God should be secondary, but in practice become working idols that drive our decisions, thoughts and actions. 2

Jesus spoke of an unforgivable sin, not because any act is unforgivable, but to warn us that our own hardness of heart can close the channels through which God's forgiveness flows and, as a consequence, leave us feeling alienated .3

“This sin against the Spirit is pervasive and not the exclusive purview of any branch of the vine. Sometimes we use Jesus to support our own claims. Sometimes we cherry-pick Scripture. Sometimes we rationalize our behavior and that of those with whom we agree. Sometimes we witness divine liberation and label it demonic possession. Sometimes we confuse the work of the devil with the mission of Jesus and vice versa. Time and time again, we can see the speck in another's eye while failing to notice the log in our own. We say we want to quiet Jesus for his own good, when really it is our own safety and reputation we worry about. We make Jesus in our own image, instead of making sure we resemble his.

Jesus is on the offensive. He comes to make clear that our loyalty to God supersedes all other loyalties, including those we've long held sacred. He tells the nice, respected, revered religious leaders they are not only misguided, they are instruments of evil. Jesus is offensive. He comes like a thief in the night to upend the rule of those long in power. He gets close to crowds, calls tax collectors, touches the unclean and eats with sinners. He speaks the truth to those in power, to us, to all. Jesus is offensive because he refuses to go along to get along, to bow down to long-accepted norms, to allow cultural or familial expectations to thwart his mission of binding up the broken hearted and liberating those long held captive.

So, what's going on in this story of family conflict, needy crowds, conspiring scribes, newbie disciples and Beelzebul? Nothing less than the overthrowing of an old, evil, oppressive order and Jesus' ushering in of God's divine one. What does Jesus' mother and brothers wanting to stage an intervention, binding up the strong man, a house divided and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit have in common? They all show where we stand: on the side of Jesus' vision and mission of liberation ... or Satan's side of oppression. They all reveal if we are part of God's family - or not.” 4

Timothy George says he never understood the radical nature of Jesus' ministry until it was driven home in a dramatic way. He was in his first year as pastor of the First Baptist Church in, Chelsea, Massachusetts. Chelsea, says George, is one of the most isolated, economically deprived, inner-city sections of greater Boston: there are 27,000 people crowded into less than two square miles. Chelsea is a receptacle for all kinds of dropouts - prostitutes, pimps, drug addicts, all the people who have not "made it" and probably never will.

Every new minister to Chelsea at that time soon became acquainted with one of these drop-outs, an alcoholic known to everyone as Johnny Cornflakes because he often

rummaged through the trash, looking through the cereal boxes or whatever to find a bit of food. George's church sometimes gave Johnny Cornflakes food and clothes and tried to see that he had a place to spend the night.

One Sunday after church Timothy George and his wife held their first dinner party in Chelsea for out-of-town guests. They had worked very hard to make everything perfect: they had brought out their best linen and their finest dishes in order to make a good impression. But right in the middle of the main course the front door of the parsonage burst open. Into their dining room in all of his inebriated glory sauntered Johnny Cornflakes.

Timothy later wrote that he suddenly knew what the Pharisees must have felt like. "Johnny Cornflakes was someone you'd hand a sandwich to at the back door, someone you'd deliver a CARE package to at the inner-city mission, but definitely not someone you would invite to a Sunday dinner! Yet," George continues, "this is exactly what Jesus did, he invited all the Johnny Cornflakes of Jerusalem to Sunday dinner with the best linen and the finest dishes." 5

On Wednesday I got an email from a woman who was staying in the Motel 6 at I-10 and 146. She said she needed food and she and her two daughters and two Chihuahuas hadn't eaten for a couple of days. I called the motel and described the person to the clerk based on what she shared in her email, and the clerk knew who it was but there was no answer at the room. So I went to our pantry and found some food that didn't require cooking, and even 4 fancy feast tins for the Chihuahuas. I stopped at a gas station and bought a loaf of bread and went after choir practice and left it with the clerk.

Yesterday at the Men's Breakfast we heard from Bill Eckert, the Executive Director of the Bay Area Homeless Services about what God's Family has been doing through that ministry since 1982. Theirs is the only homeless shelter for intact families east of Houston. In addition they have a men's and a women's facility. We heard his lowest point story and some of his highest point stories. The work of that shelter is taking care of God's Family.

Yesterday Ron Parker shared with me that rather than take meals away from needy folks because of funding cuts that he had to cut his staff in order to continue taking care of God's Family.

Jesus says his true family is made up of those who *do* understand and do the will of God. This is an explosive statement! Jesus is threatening the most fundamental of structures, the human family. Blood ties are not the determining factor when it comes to God's family. According to Jesus what really unites us is spirit and truth.

Roger Rosenblatt once said that what *is* valuable in families is that they are normal people struggling to do good and be good, strengthening themselves by listening to each other, paying attention to other families, and encouraging each other to be fair, honest, and kind. That sounds like a decent list of family values to me. All kinds of families can do those things whether they are made up of biological parents, single

parents, step parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, grandparents, or people who have never been parents but can join in helping raise children through teaching, mentoring, working with CASA like Debbye Waller, teaching Sunday school like Betty Dugat and Kay Lynn Whitcomb. That's God's Family at work

How many of you here were born in Texas. How many not born in Texas? God's family is not about the town you came from or the house you grew up in, but whether the people there served God and others. This gives us all a very, very large family, the family we were baptized into. When we baptize a child we say that the child is first God's child and then ours. Baptism expands our definition of family to include all nations, all ages, and all conditions of human existence. For Jesus, family is not about genetics and who raised us. It's about the image in which we are created.

Some of us grew up watching the afternoon television program, *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*. Some of watched our children grow up watching Mt. Roger's Neighborhood. I think Mr. Rogers exemplified what Jesus was getting at. When Mr. Rogers changed into his sweater and tennis shoes, it was a biblical gesture of self-emptying humility and welcome to all of us into HIS neighborhood. When he sang the litany we loved to hear, "It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood, a beautiful day for a neighbor, would you be mine? Could you be mine?" We wanted to answer, "Yes!" The family values we saw in *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* were courtesy and kindness and curiosity. 6

Mr. Rogers Neighborhood came to the big screen this last Friday. Anne and I are planning to go see it for the Movie Group that we are a part of. We're going not just because the Rev. Fred Rogers was a Presbyterian Minister, but because we want to support movies that emphasize courtesy and kindness and curiosity. I like movies that have one super hero at a time. It makes it so much easier to follow. I don't want to go to a movie about an Infinity War for fear the movie or the war would never end. I'd rather follow a super hero whose powers are courtesy, kindness and curiosity. We don't need a King, Samuel. We need humble leaders who stoop to serve.

You and I may differ on definitions of family and what constitutes family values, but we all know we can learn something indispensable from Jesus. He teaches us to put God first. He teaches us to value others. He teaches us to treat one another the way we want to be treated. He teaches us to treat each other and others with courtesy and kindness and curiosity. He calls us to come together from the Northeast and Southwest corners of our living rooms and worship together. He teaches us to treat one another like who they really are: members of ... God's Family.

Let's Pray.

Loving God, we give you thanks for our refuge in Jesus, our haven and shelter. In Him we see your care for us when we are attacked or aggrieved. In him we see your anger with forces that hinder our obedience. In Him we see your compassion for our weakness, and your clear call to rise above our doubts and misgivings. In Him we see your firm resolution that nothing shall ultimately separate us from your love.

We give you thanks for brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers and all those who are family to us in the venture of our faith. Upon them we rely for nurture and sustenance, support and guidance and understanding and forgiveness as we search for your truth. We give thanks that we can trust them when all else around us is threatening, and rely on them without feeling ashamed. The household of faith abounds with signs of your tenderness and mercy. We give thanks for Jesus who is the cornerstone, and for each other upon whom we rely to show your love.

We pray for the meeting in Singapore this week. We pray that the leaders of these 2 countries and the nations who will be affected by what comes out of this summit. We are concerned about the future of our world. Teach us how to be good neighbors that love our neighbors as ourselves and of course love our Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

This we pray in the name of Jesus our Lord. ..and the people said, Amen.

1. King Duncan, ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc.
2. Jill Duffield Looking into the Lectionary.
3. David G. Rogne, Sermons for Sundays after Pentecost
4. Jill Duffield, Looking into the Lectionary
5. Kristin Borsgard Wee, CSS Publishing Company, Inc., Sermons for Sundays after Pentecost (First Third): Do You Love Me?,
6. King Duncan ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc.