

REFLECTION
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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.” . . . 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.”

Yes, Jesus had brothers and sisters. And Mary had children, other than Jesus. At least that’s what this Gospel assumes. It’s part of the story that is usually left out. Brothers and sisters. We can only imagine those growing-up years and the relationships that Jesus had with his biological brothers and sisters. It’s something I don’t think anyone has ever written about. Except here, in this incident that appears early in Mark’s Gospel—the third chapter. We can only wonder why Mark has included this incident in this story of redemption. I’ve read what many preachers have concluded—usually some sort of critique or defense of the family—but I don’t buy it. It sounds to me as if Mark uses this incident to build this Gospel account of the salvific mission and ministry of Jesus in such a way that we won’t make the mistake of thinking that Jesus comes just to make things better. Redemption isn’t about a smooth progression of making the world a better place—from bad to good, and then from good to better. Redemption requires the end of something in order to bring about something new. It’s a break, a full-stop. Redemption isn’t something you can sneak into. It is decisive—which means you must choose. Redemption, like growth, isn’t just about getting bigger. It’s about change. Radical change. Resulting in something unrecognizably new.

Just look at those crazy Cicada bugs flying all around us. That little grub that comes out of the ground splits open and out comes a red-eyed adolescent that buzzes around with an undeterrable intent that is nothing less than “a mission.” Let me try this a different way. It’s hard growing up. There is a book, a guide for parents, by Dr. Anthony Wolf that tackles the changes and struggles that adolescents and their parents go through— at least in our culture—as they stumble through a long process of growing up. The book has maybe, the best title every given: “*Get Out of My Life, but First Could You Drive Me &*

Cheryl to the Mall” With wit and compassion Dr. Wolf points out that the basic issues of adolescence and the relationships between parents and their children is mostly about the need, rather *the mission*, to separate. And when a teenager seems the most incorrigible, it is because separation is just as hard (and scary) for them as it is for parents. It’s easier just to pick a fight and slam a door. Growing up, like *Redemption*, isn’t just about getting bigger, it’s about change.

When I was 15 I had a boyfriend named Mike. What I remember most fondly about Mike was the time he came over to say ‘good-bye’ when we were going back to New Jersey after a summer in Maryland. He showed up in his football uniform, helmet-in-hand. And he had that black gunk smeared under his eyes on his cheekbones. What a knight in shining armor ready to do battle for the girl he loved! We maintained a friendship over the years that had a little extra pa-zazz to it, but our lives went different ways. The first summer I came home after a year in seminary, I saw Mike. He teased me just like the good ol’ days and I threw a rock at him—the way adolescents flirt. His mother was driving by and stopped the car. She got out and came over and hugged me. “It’s so good to see that you are still the same. I was so worried when I heard you were in seminary.” It’s hard to grow up. It’s even harder to change when the people who love you and who you love, don’t want you to change. Or don’t understand.

In Mark’s Gospel Jesus’ family have some concern about him. After a confrontation with the scribes in their hometown his mother and his brothers and sisters go looking for him. How ironic that those who think they know Jesus the best try to stop him from fulfilling his mission. And Mark, in order to make his point about redemption, about radical change, about the mission of Jesus, tells us that when some people come to Jesus and tell him that his family is outside looking for him, he answers:

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.

Jesus' mission isn't about making something bad into something good or about making something good, better as if redemption is just a smooth process. Jesus' mission is something entirely new—even unrecognizable and confusing to others. The radically new and profound change that Jesus makes possible is a new family to which we all belong—and that is the family of God. It is what identifies us as a community in the Name of Christ. We are not just each other's neighbors but we are to share our love with one another, and to share our lives with one another. We are to know each other, live with one another, celebrate with one another, mourn with one another. We are to protect one another. Grow with one another. We are not just another neighborhood, another community or club—we are mothers, brothers, fathers, sisters—members of God's family. It's a radical idea. It means that there are no outsiders. The only requirement is that we be about the business of growing up together—becoming more of who God has call us each to be. Not the same, but uniquely who God has created us each to be.

Mark's Gospel is a story of redemption. There is no escaping the presence of conflict and clashing powers in the world—of confusion and even fear. We are not called just to *keep on keeping on*...We are not moving from bad to good, or even from good to better, but we are called to something new—something intentional. We are given a mandate. Living *in Christ* is about radical change:

- ~ from exclusion to inclusion
- ~ from self-centeredness to loving and serving others
- ~ from purposelessness to mission
- ~ from being strangers to being family

Yes, Jesus had brothers and sisters. And Mary had children other than Jesus. And when they too, witnessed Jesus' life in God they followed him into his new family—a new family where *whoever does the will of God become Jesus' brothers and sisters and mother*” and in following Christ we become family with each other.

AMEN.