

Jesus, our Brother
Sermon for the Parish of South Darebin
Third Sunday After Pentecost, 9 June 2024
Mark 3: 20–35

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Today's gospel reading contains some challenges.

In the chapters prior to it, Mark records Jesus driving out evil spirits from people, healing many people, including a man with leprosy and a paralytic. As we saw last week, Mark recounts Jesus applying the Mosaic law in a loving and compassionate way that angered the Pharisees who wanted to do away with him.

Following that, Mark recounts more stories of Jesus attracting huge crowds from the north, south, east and west who came to Galilee to listen and learn from him. Again, Mark records that Jesus continued to heal many and to cast out evil spirits from people.

This is where we pick up the story in today's passage.

Let me point out some things to you from the passage.

First, we read that Jesus' family had gone to restrain him because they thought he had gone out of his mind! They thought he was going crazy! (verse 21). Perhaps they thought he was on the point of burnout, or perhaps it was because they had heard that he had taken on the Pharisees with his reinterpretation of the fourth commandment about keeping the sabbath day holy.

Second, the scribes who had come down from Jerusalem, presumably because of the commotion Jesus was making through attracting such large crowds, said that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebul (which literally meaning 'Lord of the Flies' but was used as a name for Satan). If his family thought he was losing his mind, the scribes thought he was demon possessed.

Third, Jesus negated their claim with his parable concerning a divided kingdom and divided household:

“No”, he said, “how can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, how can that kingdom stand? And if a household is divided against itself, that house will not stand.” (verses 24–25)

His logic made perfect sense and perhaps should also have assured his family that the things he was doing were of God and were not the result of him going out of his mind.

Fourth, Jesus recognised that the scribes were in fact ascribing to Satan the miraculous healings and exorcisms that he had performed in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus affirmed that God would forgive all manner of sin that people might commit, but that

blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven. This is the one unforgiveable sin. These scribes had witnessed the saving grace and work of the Holy Spirit and ascribed it to the work of Satan. This is what blasphemy against the Holy Spirit means. When work is being done in the Spirit's life-giving and healing, and that work is ascribed to Satan by those who should know better, this is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and God will not forgive this sin. I think there is warning here for us all.

Sometimes we hear of other Christians who do things differently from us. Sometimes these Christians draw great followings and amazing things happen through them. We need to be careful not to be quick in belittling their work because it is different from the way we do things, or because they attract great crowds as Jesus was doing. If what is happening through their ministry is indeed the work of the Holy Spirit, then we should give thanks for it and praise God. Of course, this does not mean that we should not use wise judgement to ensure that it really is the work of God that is being done and that the results are God-honouring.

Finally, Mark tells us that it was after this exchange with the scribes concerning the work of Beelzebul, and while the crowds were sitting around him in the house where he was, that his mother and his brothers arrived. The place was so crowded that they couldn't get in, so they called out to him. Interestingly, Mark tells us that it was those sitting around Jesus, who almost certainly were doing so to learn from him, who alerted Jesus to the fact that his mother and brothers were outside wanting to see him. Then we read this strange response from Jesus that on first reading seems cruel and unloving.

'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.' (verses 33–34)

I think it is important that we don't jump to the conclusion that Jesus is rejecting his family by saying this. We know that Jesus loved his mother and brothers. You will recall that as he hung on the cross, Jesus asked John to care for his mother. Jesus' brothers also were with him to the end of his earthly ministry and his brother James became a leader of the church.

What is important to note is that Jesus saw his family to *include* the crowd sitting around him to learn from him. He said *whoever* does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother. This did not exclude his blood relatives. It's interesting too that Mark did not tell us what happened next. Jesus may very well have invited his blood relatives to join him inside with 'the rest of his family'. Clearly Jesus' relationship with his blood relatives did not stop from this point onwards.

Jesus' statement is quite wonderful! Anyone who does the will of God is part of Jesus' closest family. That means if you and I are doing the will of God, that we too are Jesus' family. Jesus is our brother and we are his siblings. How wonderful!

Amen.