

*Mark 3: 20-35      2 Corinthians 4:13 - 5:1*

In recent weeks, I have had a number of reminders about the importance of families. We all grow older and families move on. Nevertheless, however far apart siblings and parents seem to have drifted, there are certain occasions that bring us together again. In support and celebration of significant birthdays or saying farewell to a family member at a funeral service, whether physically or via Zoom or Skype.. At such times we realise how strong family ties still are.

Whether we've grown up in supportive or in problematic situations, our early experience of family life marks us for life. Then, if we have children of our own, don't we find that, while they may eventually leave home to follow their own careers or callings, we are constantly concerned about their well-being.

Our Gospel reading this morning reminds us of the importance of such relationships in the family of God.

Jesus was very popular with ordinary people - wherever he went, crowds followed him. In today's Gospel, he goes home and the crowd that followed him was so large that he didn't even have time to eat. It was not the first time this had happened and his family were worried for him, because they'd heard people saying he was going out of his mind.

Jesus had left the security of Nazareth for a life on the road. His work as a carpenter in Nazareth must have provided him with a good way of life. He would have had his family around him, with all the love and care that brought and friends and family would have expected him to carry on with the carpentry. So his mother and brothers thought it was unwise to leave all this to become a wandering preacher, who often didn't even have time to eat !

Of course, not only did Jesus leave the security of his home behind, he left the safety of a peaceful lifestyle, and already he had made bitter enemies out of the powerful local clergy, the Scribes. Very soon, his life would be in danger. At the moment they're claiming he's in league with the pagan God, Beelzebub.

If, in our reading, Jesus chooses not to go out to his mother and brothers, its not because he's stopped loving them but because to return home would be to take a step backwards; returning to the old value system with its traditions and boundaries.

However, the purpose of Jesus's ministry was not to support the status quo but to proclaim the kingdom of God. So, for him, a return to the old lifestyle is impossible.

Many fears, hatreds and divisions tear our world apart today and, as followers of Christ, we are called to recognise where evil is at work and to commit ourselves to overcoming it. As members of God's family, we are invited to gather round Christ's teaching and mission. Some of the people who followed Jesus were just wanting to be in on the action, while others could already be called "disciples", who no doubt

believed they were following Jesus out of conviction. From them, Jesus had just chosen 12 who would be more closely identified with his mission throughout their lives.

The powerful Scribes couldn't deny Jesus was healing people, they'd actually seen it happen! But he was not singing from their hymnsheet, and they were worried that they were losing control of large sections of the population. To them, he is not obeying the clear word of scripture, so he must be wrong, however commendable his healings appear to be. They see his power and only know two sources of such power -God, and the devil.

Jesus asks them to look not just at their theory of God but at the reality. The simple fact is that everything Jesus has done is good. It has resulted in the restoration of the children of God to the human community. Everywhere he goes, madness, evil and sickness are banished. How can that be the work of the devil?

Jesus said, *"Who are my mother and my brothers? Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister and mother."*

Here, in Mark's Gospel, Jesus is carrying out God's word, rather than simply proclaiming it in words. The family of God is accepting and doesn't exclude anyone. Jesus did not show partiality; he allowed everyone the privilege of obeying God and becoming part of the family. In our increasingly computerised, impersonal world, warm relationships among members of God's family take on major importance.

We, as Church, can make a difference. We can give the loving, personalised care that many people find nowhere else. During this Coronavirus period we have all been given time to review our lifestyles. We've all been giving much thought to what will be "normal" in future. What we wish to do with the years ahead. Let's ensure that whatever else we decide to do, working to combat evil and to welcome others into God's loving family is up there at the top of our agendas. God. So, for him, a return to the old lifestyle is