

Something about That Name

Pentecost 2, Year B

Mark 3:21-27, 31-35

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I. Introduction: Something about That Name

“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus...there’s just something about that name...”

That name provokes strong feelings: love, contrition, guilt, anger, peace, gratitude...

That name provokes strong action: on the one hand, acts of radical hospitality, sacrifice, and self-giving; and on the other, of hatefulness and persecution—not only against Christians but by Christians.

“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus...there’s just something about that name...”

II. That Name Stirs People Up

In today’s gospel lesson *that name* has everyone stirred up:

The crowds are excited
The religious leaders are angry
And Jesus’ family is terrified

Mark tells us that when Jesus’ family “heard about this, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind’” (3:21).

What have they heard that’s got them so scared? That Jesus has been breaking the law left and right— eating with outcasts (Mark 2:13-17), healing on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6), driving out demons (Mark 3:7-12), and, most egregious, forgiving sins (Mark 2:1-12); who but God, Jewish law asks, can forgive transgressions but God?

Jesus’ family rightly fears for his and *their* safety.

The religious leaders are so angry that they accuse him of consorting with Beelzebul, lord of darkness, and casting out demons in *his name*. This is a serious accusation, the kind that can get a man killed.

But rather than let his family subdue him, Jesus speaks up. *Please don't*, you can almost hear his worried mother whisper.

“How can Satan cast out Satan?” Jesus asks, challenging the scribes and everyone in the crowd.

The cartoon character, Maxine, put it this way: “If Satan were an angel and God made the angels, then how could Satan be stronger than God?”

But Jesus isn't talking about God *overpowering* Satan; he's simply raising a logistical impossibility:

How can evil cast out evil? That's like saying you can get out a grease stain with grease or clean dirt off the floor with dirt. It's impossible.

It's impossible for Jesus, if he were evil, to get rid of evil.

Though he doesn't directly say so here, Jesus implies that his power is of God, and it's *this* implication the religious authorities don't like.

III. That Name Takes Risks

The storm starts a couple chapters back when Mark tells us that Jesus enters a synagogue and amazes everyone by teaching with “authority, *not as the scribes*” (1:22-22).

Imagine what that must have been like for the scribes. *They're* the teachers, the seats of religious authority, and Jesus has essentially upstaged them.

It'd be like working at a job for years and watching some young hotshot, fresh out of school, get a promotion.

If this insult isn't enough, Jesus goes on to heal a man on the Sabbath (1:23-27), an action prohibited by law.

What are we to make of this, we who work, in some way or another, every day of the week?

We cheer Jesus on; but the scribes are understandably outraged.

Imagine if a young new pastor were to come to Marley and fail to respect something we hold sacred. Perhaps he omits the Lord's Prayer or Apostle's Creed from the worship service, or removes the American flag from the sanctuary.

Could we no longer worship God without these things? We could, but they are important to us, and we might be angry if they were tampered with.

In the same way, the scribes were angry that Jesus blatantly disregarded God's commandment to keep the Sabbath holy by resting from labor one day a week.

Is Jesus breaking God's commandment. Strictly speaking, yes. But what he reveals in doing so is that God's mercy exceeds his law; for example, if a person is in need of healing, God through Jesus can reach out to him or her regardless of the day of the week. It's not that God's earlier commandments are invalid but that they're trumped by God's law of love and mercy through Jesus.

So tell me: why, at the end of his gospel monologue, does Jesus say something counter God's love and mercy?—that those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven and are guilty of an eternal sin (3:29). (Butt, Kyle. "Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—the 'Unpardonable Sin'". Apologetics Press 2003).

Does this mean that if we get angry with God and say something hateful to him we are forever guilty?

No. Jesus was speaking specifically to the scribes who, in saying he had "an unclean spirit" (3:30), were accusing him of being evil. It was this accusation, and nothing else, that Jesus called *the* blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Still, would there be no forgiveness for them if they repented? I want to think so, but the Gospel of Mark would disagree.

IV. That Name Expands God's Family

It's no surprise that at this point in the story, Jesus' family, outside the room where Jesus has been speaking, sends a message for him to come out (3:31). "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you," the people around Jesus tell him.

He not only stays put but seems to insult his family:

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asks. Looking at those sitting around him, he says, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister" (3:32-5).

What do you mean Mary's not your mother? After all she went through?

But I have to remind myself of the context of today's gospel story; Mary and Jesus' brothers have been trying to restrain him from getting involved; understandably, they are trying to protect him, and themselves, from trouble, but Jesus isn't backing down.

Contrary to how it looks, Jesus is not disowning his family nor speaking negatively *about them*; he's speaking about himself and his mission: to do the will of God, regardless of the trouble it may cause.

In this story, the will of God is to speak up. Anyone who joins in doing the will of God is part of his family.

I read a story about a father of five who comes home from work with a toy and asks his children which one should get the present. "Who obeys mom and doesn't talk back to her but does everything she tells them to do?" The five kids are silent then one pipes up: "You play with the toy, Daddy!"

Jesus follows the Father, and he wants us to do the same.

We see this in the gospel lesson today :

The people crowd in on Jesus.
His family tries to intercede.
The scribes accuse Jesus of being evil.
His family again tries to intercede.
Jesus calls the people who do God's will his family.

The story starts with the people, moves to the family and the religious leaders, and then reverses course:

People
Family
Leaders
Family
People

Strangely, it's the structure of the passage that reveals its meaning: all who do God's will are included.

In Jesus' day, it was thought that the religious leaders had special status, that they were somehow more important than the people or had a more direct connection to God.

The structure of the gospel passage, though, blows this idea completely out of the water.

Jesus, in his compassion for people, ministers to people and counters those who say he shouldn't; the family of God isn't limited to a precious few but open to all.

V. That Name Welcomes Everyone

This seems like an easy message—a Kumbaya feel-good message about how everyone gets to be included—but it's quite challenging. If everyone gets to be included then those in positions of privilege have to give up their status and regard others as equals. Further, love is to be extended not only to those we find it easiest to love but to those we find difficult to love as well.

In today's message we're challenged to include all people in the family of God; we can practice this right here at Marley. We already open our doors to visitors and show them hospitality, but we can go a step further; step *outside* our sanctuary and meet people on more equal footing: playing games, sharing food and listening to music.

In the spirit of the gospel I urge you to come, participate, help and invite as many people as possible that they might be touched by God and choose to be part of his family.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus...there's just something about that name
Master, Savior, Jesus
Like the fragrance after the rain
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus
Let all heaven and earth proclaim
Kings and kingdoms shall all pass away
But there's something about that name.