

Proper 5 Year B

1 Samuel 8: 4-11, 16-20

Psalm 138

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1.

Mark 3: 20-35.

THIS is the first time that Mark has mentioned Jesus's family. When reading this Gospel, we have to forget what we know from the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke because, for Mark, Jesus is a charismatic young man who appeared on the scene in a whirlwind of activity, with no background information except that he came from Nazareth and lived in Capernaum.

Mark's readers had some additional information: that Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit, and was then driven into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. People in Mark's story who met Jesus, however, did not know of this earlier conflict, or the source of his power, which was displayed so frequently in the early part of the Gospel. So, confronted with a miracle worker, they were confused, and asked questions — they thought he was mad! Or in league with the devil.

Themes: Disturbance, Family

Jesus' Family Discord

The worst thing for teenage boy ...

Parents just don't understand' might be an ever-present theme in popular music, but it's hardly a modern phenomenon.

If you're looking for snapshots of well-adjusted and happy parent-child relationships from the ancient world, the Bible probably shouldn't be on your short list of sources.

Consider even Jesus' family, mother was rather strained.

siblings, as well.

An important source is Mark 3:21, which says: 'When his family heard what was happening, they came to take control of him. They were saying, 'He's out of his mind!'. Yet, Christian tradition has had a difficult time reckoning with the perhaps troubling idea of family strife between Jesus and his kin.

Consider what translators and even other Gospel authors have done with Mark 3:21:

Mark says family. Others say friends or leave it out altogether.

The story told in the wider context, [Mark 3:20-35](#), sets Jesus' family in comparison to influential religious leaders (legal scholars based in Jerusalem). Both groups express an inability to understand who Jesus really is.

The religious authorities conclude he is possessed by Satan.

His family assumes he has lost his sanity.

Much the same

Still did not see Jesus as a man of God.

They saw him as a disturber and disrupter.

Maybe Jesus' relatives were dismayed that the first-born son wasn't supporting his family but was gallivanting around Galilee as a self-appointed prophet.

The Gospel of Mark does not explain; it merely sets up a showdown of sorts when the family arrives to seize Jesus.

Family, Reconsidered

Jesus answers with a shocking statement: 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? ... Look, here [these people seated around me] are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother, sister and mother.'

It's good news for those inside the house, who seek to identify with Jesus and his message. It's also good news for Mark's earliest readers who found themselves estranged from their biological families. Bad news, however, for his relatives on the outside, and for others with high regard for customary notions of honour and social stability.

Jesus redefines the criteria for who constitutes his true family.

Jesus makes a claim about what it might mean to belong to other people. He makes a claim about identity.

Families, or 'households,' were the primary social and economic units of first-century society.

Jesus speaks to deeply embedded cultural assumptions when he determines his true family not by blood relations or kinship ties but by doing the will of God.

No wonder some people are bent on killing him.

Unhealthy family.

Evil

Our Values as Reflections of God's Commitment to Humanity

Jesus did not abolish the idea of family or household. It goes too far to suggest he *overthrew* his culture's values about family, society and religion -- in this passage or any other. But he does extend it.

When Jesus teaches, heals and makes pronouncements, everything gets put up for renegotiation. Old values aren't necessarily flawed, simply by virtue of their being old or established. But God's presence in the world, manifested through Jesus' words and actions, repeatedly upends conventional assumptions about what's 'real' or what's 'normal.' It upends them, not to change them for change's sake, but so we might reconsider just how they can be authentic manifestations of who God is and how God can be known. For God wills to be known by us, in the particularity of our real lives and relationships.