

Third Sunday after Pentecost – 2024

Genesis 3:8-15

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Mark 3:20-35

God gives us a family. Family is a beautiful gift. Belonging; comfort; security; these are all words that ought to immediately pop in someone's head when they think of family. Love; provision; support; family is a defense against the world. The world is cold. The world is filled with strangers who have their own concerns, their own agenda, their own first principles. Family is where I am known precisely as I am. Family is a soft and warm afghan on a frigid, lonely night. Family is a birthday cake with lots of candles and the light from those candles illuminate happy faces that are stable and true and generous with their love. God gives us a family. Sin can break it apart. Not everyone thinks happy thoughts when the word family is uttered. The first family was broken. Adam failed to defend Eve against the serpent and then threw her under the family bus in an attempt to exonerate himself. Eve thought herself to be autonomous and acted independently of her husband. Cain murdered his brother, Abel. Misery came to the first family. No matter how grievous your experience has been, none of you have known misery like this.

God gives us a family. Christianity is a family. God is our Father and the Lord Christ is our brother and that is family of the highest order. It's not a substitute. God has no intention of ripping anyone out of the bond of blood, out of the union of husband and wife, out of the kinship of brother and sister. But Christianity is a family. Forgiveness and faith; Christ the King's family has a structure of grace, an alliance built by death and resurrection, a unity that is based on truth and things much greater than ourselves. Jesus had a family. Mother and brothers and sisters, and dear Joseph, the man who raised Him; Jesus had a family (Matthew 13:53-58). And He built His church. Passover was to be eaten with one's family and Jesus ate His last Passover with His disciples (Exodus 12:3; Luke 22:7-8). Jesus was misunderstood. By His family, Jesus was misunderstood. The Lord's fame was growing and His family "went out to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind'" (Mark 3:21). How do you like that? Jesus' family was going to do an intervention. He's blown a fuse, He's loco, He needs to be brought home so we can straighten Him out. Chaos surrounded the Lord Christ on every level, including His immediate family.

At the end of this episode, St. Mark uses some intuitive words, some telltale words. The crowd was gathered "inside" around Jesus. The Lord's biological family was "outside." The crowd was in the position of learners, disciples, genuine family. The biological family was in the position of the hostile authorities. And this is the kicker: "'Your mother and brothers are outside, seeking you.' And he answered them, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking around at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother'" (Mark 3:32-35). What do you think of that? Do you think that Jesus is exaggerating to make a point? Do you think that He has every intention to forge a unit that is the epitome of family, the transcendent family of heaven? Here's a black and white statement from the Son of God: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). If you feel unworthy, welcome to the club. The truth is that none of us are worthy.

Do you know who Christ makes members of His family? Sinners; all types of sinners; all of us who are unworthy for one reason or another or for a zillion different reasons. An adulterous woman who was about to be stoned for her sin – she is family, our family (John 8:1-11). A height-challenged scoundrel of a tax collector, a pariah in Israel – he is family, our family (Luke 19:1-10). A justly crucified terrorist (ληστης), who prayed that Jesus would remember him when the Lord came into His kingdom – that thief is family, our family (Luke 23:32-43). The people in these pews, the high-born rascal and the low-born blaggard, the European Christians and the South American believers and the Asian disciples and the Africans who confess Christ and Him crucified – we are a part of a transcendent family. Sinners who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and who call upon His name as our Savior; the church is a family. What He did then, 2000 years ago, made us a family. What He is doing now makes us a family.

The religious rulers were uttering the worst kind of blasphemy. Blasphemy is calling good evil and evil good. They said that Jesus was possessed of the devil, entirely in league with the Prince of Hell. “He is possessed by Beelzebul.” “By the prince of demons he casts out demons” (Mark 3:22). Do people lie about Christ the King today? Do lies about God hurt the vulnerable, profane His holy name, advance darkness in the world? Does the Lord just stand idly by while this refuse fills the air? Jesus shatters the darkness with His Word. Simple logic and a sterling parable win the day. Satan is the adversary. Jesus had been liberating people from Satan’s cruel grasp by exorcising demons from those possessed. Jesus describes Satan as the “strong man” who guards his house, his possessions. The world; In the Garden, Satan gained for himself a race of slaves. Because of sin, because of original sin, you and I were born into slavery. And the Son of God came into the world. Liberation; what do you think it means? To be liberated, what does it mean? Some think that it means the luxury of living for oneself. Do you want to live for yourself? A prison cell or living for yourself, which would you prefer? Has Christ and His cross liberated you?

Jesus is the “stronger man” in this parable. He says that He first must bind up the “strong man.” How is the Messiah going to do that? He wants to return you to the Father, He wants to forge His family, to draw the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve into His church, back to paradise, back to walking with God in the cool of the day. How would Jesus bind up the “strong man?” Death; Jesus allowed Satan to spend his unholy rage on Him. Death; the pure sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world was lifted up and Satan’s dread weapon was unleashed. Our family is born of the cross. The price of darkness is undone as Jesus lays down His life (John 12:31-32). Christ bore our curse. Christ bore Adam’s curse as He offered Himself up for Adam’s sin. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Galatians 3:13). Jesus bore the adulterous woman, bore Zacchaeus the tax collector, bore the thief dying next to Him and He bore you and me. To make us a family, His family, a blessed and forgiven and holy family, the Lord Christ bore us all.

This is our home. Wherever the Word and the Sacraments are is our home. Wherever Christ crucified is preached is our home. Wherever two or three are gathered in His name is our home. Wherever sinners hearken to the Shepherd’s voice, wherever absolution is spoken – words that

drip with the blood of the Christ – wherever hymns are sung and prayers are offered and brothers and sisters adore their Lord and each other – that is our home. This home is a foretaste of our heavenly home. The joy you know here you will know there in full. The beauty and love and fellowship you know here you will know there in full. They are connected. Life here and life in heaven are connected. Family here and family there are one. We are liberated and we live not for ourselves but for Him who died and rose again (2 Corinthians 5:15). “With angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of Your glory!”