

June 6, 2021

Mark 3: 19-b-21, 31-35

Rev. Larry Brown - Powell United Methodist Church

“Inside to Outside to Inside”

“We are the family of God...Yes, we are the family of God...And God’s brought us together so we can be one....that we would bring light to the world.” (Song and lyrics by Jon Byron, 1976) I learned this song year’s ago when I was beginning my ministry and serving as a youth pastor. The youth group under my care went on a summer mission trip where the members of a mission outpost were coaching our group to go into the surrounding community to share the message of Christ’s love. This stretched all of us, both the young people and we who were adult leaders. We were used to doing church in a building and defining church as “the people we knew when we gathered on Sunday mornings.” The message of that mission outpost was that the love and joy we claimed God was giving us was for others, too. Yes, we were the family of God but our mission was to bring light to the world. As it turned out, knowing God loved us wasn’t the end of our faith journey. It was the beginning.

The relationship of a spiritual family has always been at the heart of Christianity. We call ourselves brothers and sisters in this faith. The bible names us as children of God. (John 1:12) We celebrate oneness in Christ, calling ourselves “Christian,” which is like a family name identifying who we are in the world. Today we have a double blessing in worship as we celebrate both the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of communion. These are sacred experiences that connect us to God, to Christ, and to each other. When the waters of baptism flow and the bread of the table is broken and shared, there is no doubt we are the family of God. Jesus wants us to also remember that his purpose is to grow the circle that defines “family,” so that it is ever wider and more inclusive. We are the family of God. Who needs to hear that good news and be included today?

There is a potentially negative side to the concept of “family” when it comes to the church. Sometimes the notion of “family” is used to decide who is in and who is out. Sometimes the idea of the church as a “family” is used to draw hard lines, where those on the inside are protective and closed off. There is plenty of evidence of this in the stories of Jesus, one of which is our reading for today in the Gospel of Mark. The story says Jesus has returned home but a whole crowd of people have followed him and filled the rooms of the house. The religious authorities, who were troubled by Jesus’ lack of consideration for the way things were supposed to be, thought he was crazy because he was concerned for those who were outside the acceptable religious boundaries. They even said there was something demonic in the way he threw caution to the wind. When the formal complaints against him did not work they sent for Jesus’ mother and brothers, hoping they could reason with him and get him back in line. Jesus responded to this challenge by clarifying that the family he was bringing into being was not determined by a set of rules or one’s biology. “We are family,” Jesus said, “when we do the will of God.” The relationship that shapes all other relationships is what God has done in Christ. We know this saves us, but not just us as individuals. Christ connects us to God and also connects us to others in love, which is the purpose and will of God. God’s brought us together that we can be one, so that we might bring light to the world.

My spoken sermon today is shorter in duration than usual because we have the double blessing I named earlier, the sacrament of both baptism and communion. There are “no worries,” as we say, And, why? Because the sacraments speak even more powerfully than our words. The water, bread and cup sharpen our focus upon what God can do. The sacraments point to the power of grace and love. This is what Jesus did the day the crowd filled the house and it’s what he does everytime we gather together. There is nothing more powerful in this faith than grace and love. If we think we are “in” with God because we’ve drawn the circle to include ourselves it’s likely this very act of self-righteousness moves us out. But the gospel isn’t bad news, it’s good news. Those on the outside are who Jesus came to save, and so we are ushered back in because of love and grace. The next you wonder if you are embraced by God or wonder if that person or that group of people is included, remember Jesus. We’re his family, all of us. About this there is no doubt, because he is the Light of the world. Amen.