

Meet Jesus... again 1: The Beginning of the Good News

Mark 1:1-15

March 10, 2019

Pastor Steve Richards

Urgent. Urgent. I think we all paid attention to the weather forecast this week – at least those of us who live here in Minnesota. From early in the week we were being warned of an unseen force from the southwest that was preparing to descend on us, and in a winter in which we have already seen more snow than most of us want, we were being promised the biggest snowstorm of the season. Urgent. Urgent. I'm not really sure what I was supposed to do, especially when the forecasters seemed so happy to bring us this news. When we lived in the Nashville area and there was even the forecast of snow, businesses closed early, schools closed, lines formed at the grocery store. Everyone barricaded themselves in their homes vowing never to leave until the snow had melted. There were no snow plows and with winding narrow roads through hilly neighborhoods – we learned the perils the hard way one Christmas Eve when both of our cars slid off the road, preventing me from getting to church for Christmas Eve services. But this week the weather reports also reminded us that spring would come, warmer temperatures, snow melting – and if you live in the Red River Valley or the Minnesota River Valley or any kind of flood plain – well, I think you know the urgency, even if you don't know what to do.

We know the sudden fright of being late for an important appointment. A momentary panic because it's a job interview or a medical appointment that was hard to schedule or a test that cannot be retaken if missed. Or some threat that has the potential to change the direction of our lives. But this morning, I want you to imagine a threat to this entire region and everyone you care about and you and everyone else is unable to escape this unseen force that has the power to destroy everything and everyone. And if you can begin to imagine this, then you may be able to understand the urgency that we hear at the beginning of the New Testament gospel of Mark.

This morning, we begin a seven part series in which we will be meeting Jesus through the words of the gospel-writer Mark. Mark was the interpreter who traveled with the apostle Peter and heard the stories of Jesus as told by Peter. In as much as we can, I'd like us to set aside what we already know about Jesus and listen to Mark's account, written for Gentiles like us who may have heard about Jesus, but now through this book have an opportunity to connect the dots and form a picture of who Jesus was and what his life means for us today.

Mark was probably written sometime between 65 and 72 AD, mostly likely about 68, almost 40 years after the death of Jesus. Two huge things were happening in the Roman Empire that may explain why Mark wrote this gospel. In Rome, which is where many think Mark was when he wrote, the Emperor Nero had just put Peter and Paul to death. This is the most traumatic event for Christians since the crucifixion – the death of the two most important apostles along with a whole host of other leaders in the church. In 64 AD, the city of Rome had a massive fire that destroyed much of the city. Many think it was Nero who ordered the fire be set so that he could have a massive building campaign, rebuilding the city as he wanted with taxes from the people. The fire was the excuse he needed. So he blamed the fire on an emerging movement of a little-known group that he called atheists because they didn't believe in the Roman pagan gods. We know them as Christians. Nero ordered that Christians be rounded up. One early Roman historian wrote that for his entertainment, Nero would have Christians set on fire to provide light for his parties. Nero had Peter crucified, but Peter asked to be crucified upside-down so he would not die the same way Jesus died. Paul was taken outside the city and beheaded.

Imagine how devastating this was for Christians in Rome, losing the leaders of the faith. And at the same time this was happening, back in Jerusalem, the Jews were revolting against the Romans. Jews had an early victory defeating a legion of soldiers – a legion was about 5,000 soldiers. But then Nero sent three more legions from Syria and they attacked, killing 100,000 Jews in Galilee, many of them Christians. And then they marched on to Jerusalem and laid siege to the east and the south and in the end killed more than 1 million Jews and Jewish Christians. This had been unimaginable. The killings in Rome and the massive slaughter of people in Israel – that's the backdrop to this book and the people who would be the first to receive the Gospel of Mark. There is an urgency to this message – reminding those who would receive it that Jesus is more powerful than any of the forces that have come against them. The Messiah had come into the world – but not as the great military leader that had been expected, but a power that would change lives from the inside out.

Mark 1:1 - The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son. Here's the breaking news. Whether it's 29 AD, with Rome breathing down their backs, or 68 AD with Rome having brought massive death and destruction, or some moment in your own life when you feel powerless to overcome forces that seem too great for you. Mark is saying there's no time to waste. Someone is coming, and John the Baptist was getting people ready. God is about to do a new thing. This is urgent. **John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sin.** John had gone into the wilderness of Qumran. He had separated himself from others, removing all distractions and taking ritual baths of purification. He and others felt that if they could be holy and pure enough that would usher in the Messiah. Then moving to the Jordan River, John called people to come out of the cities and to be baptized. It was time to change their hearts and lives. The Greek word is *metanoia* – repent. Suddenly you see with your mind, I've not been living the way I know I should be living. The Greek word for sin is *hamartia* – to miss the mark. There is a mark of how we are to live, but we all stray from the mark. None of us live perfectly every day, and because we stray, we have a need to get back on track. That starts with the mind, thinking differently – and after thinking differently, I realize I missed the mark. And then inside, I feel badly. I feel regret. I have a change of heart. I don't want to be the person I've been I want to be better than that. I want to be the person God wants me to be, and that leads to change in action. Repentance is a U-turn.

Last week, I was watching an episode of *This is us*, a dramatic series on NBC that is often hard to watch because the family struggles seem so real and so difficult to overcome. The focus of last week's episode was Kevin, one of the adult children who was wildly successful in his career but he carries pain and insecurity from his past that he has tried to escape and overcome through alcohol – but the alcohol takes over sending him into even deeper despair. He was at his twin sister's graduation party when the sound of a martini shaker sends him running back to his most trusted companion – alcohol. He is powerless – on his own, he is powerless, even if he is not yet ready to admit it. He needs a change of heart and life that will exchange the power of alcohol with the even greater power that the Messiah was bringing into the world. Urgent. Urgent.

This week, our music ministry will bring us the story of The Music Man. In the summer of 1912, a man named Harold Hill brings his deceptive practices to the fictional town of River City, Iowa. He is a con man. All he really cares about is himself and profiting from his deception, promising parents that if they will buy band instruments and uniforms, he can turn a ragtag band into playing music, a shy boy into speaking, a town into believe in itself, and a librarian named Marian into love. He launches his plan by persuading the town that there is an evil influence in their presence and he has the solution – never mind that in reality, he is that evil influence. But

by the end of the musical, this mysterious stranger changes everyone for the best – when Harold Hill realizes something about himself. It is a love story, after all – and his affection for Marian produces a change of heart. As the musical comes to a rousing conclusion, Harold Hill has made a U-turn – a change of heart and life – repentance – metanoia. He has discovered that what he gives is worth far more than what he planned to take.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus bursts on the scene when he comes to John to be baptized and something happens. **While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him.** With Jesus, the gap between heaven and earth is bridged. No longer is heaven a faraway concept, off in the future, but it is real and it exists in this moment. Jesus is bringing the kingdom of God into this world. **At once, the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness.** And that's what happens to us. We make a U-turn. We promise. We commit to living differently and in the next breath or the next day temptation calls out to us. (my 40 day commitment to live without social media lasted just one day! It is not easy to change one's heart and life.) Jesus has this profound experience – heaven to earth, the sky torn apart, the voice of God saying, "You are my son whom I dearly love." And in the next moment, he's tempted and tested for 40 days. The gospels of Matthew and Luke provide the details of what Jesus faced. He's offered wealth and power and a long life – it's what we all want at points in our lives. Just take care of yourself. It's what Harold Hill found so compelling. We all do. But Jesus listened to the voice of God who said, "You are my child whom I dearly love." That's the way of life.

As this morning's reading from Mark concludes, we learn that John the Baptist has been arrested. It is time for Jesus to act. Urgent. It is the urgent sign for Jesus to begin.

Where is your sign of urgency – your realization that it is time to act? Last Monday, I received a text message from our daughter, Bethany. I've received a lot of urgent messages from her through the years. I knew she had a doctor's appointment on Monday, and I asked how it had gone. And she replied with this [sonogram of baby] Dad, meet your grandson. That's my sign – urgency. Get ready. Heaven comes to earth. Change your hearts and lives.

What is your sign of urgency? For Mark, it was a Roman Empire, and a force that they seemed powerless to overcome. And there may very well be a threat that could consume you. Or maybe, just maybe it is a sign that life is bursting into your world – something new is on the horizon and it's time. It's time to be ready.

Grow, Pray, study for Week of March 10, 2019

Weekly Prayer: God of Eternal Love, we have made our commitment and have come to meet with you. As we begin our Lenten journey: Teach us to worship with passion and gather together with love. Teach us to pray with faith and read your word with understanding. Teach us to give generously, serve compassionately and use our time mindfully, so that we may reflect your love so that others will discover your grace through us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Announcing God's Good News

Monday, March 11

Scripture: Mark 1:1-20
Beginning of good news

The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son, happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah: *Look, I am sending my messenger before you. He will prepare your way, a voice shouting in the wilderness: "Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight."*

John's preaching

John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. He announced, "One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Jesus is baptized and tempted

About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. And there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."

At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness.¹³ He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.

Jesus' message

After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!"

Jesus calls disciples

As Jesus passed alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," he said, "and I'll show you how to fish for people." Right away, they left their nets and followed him. After going a little farther, he saw James and John, Zebedee's sons, in their boat repairing the fishing nets. At that very moment he called them. They followed him, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers.

Observation: Can you sense the urgency in Mark's introductory words? He has "good news" (which is the meaning of the word "gospel") to share, and he immediately gets down to the business of providing the message. God is on our side, and he wants us to know how this is communicated through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Get ready! This is meant for you!

Application: Mark reported Jesus' clear, urgent message. "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives." "Come, follow me!" The Common English Bible translates the Greek word *metanoia* (often translated "repent") as "change your hearts and lives." The Greek literally meant "to turn around, change directions." Jesus didn't call people to a onetime emotional event, but to a lasting choice to live in a new way. What are some of the chief ways Jesus has led you to change your heart and life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your invitation must have been so appealing to move these busy fishermen to drop everything to follow you! Make me ever readier to respond to your call "right away." Amen.

Jesus traveled throughout Galilee

Tuesday, March 12

Scripture: Mark 1:21-39

Jesus throws a demon out

Jesus and his followers went into Capernaum. Immediately on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and started teaching. The people were amazed by his teaching, for he was teaching them with authority, not like the legal experts. Suddenly, there in the synagogue, a person with an evil spirit screamed, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. You are the holy one from God." "Silence!" Jesus said, speaking harshly to the demon. "Come out of him!" The unclean spirit shook him and screamed, then it came out. Everyone was shaken and questioned among themselves, "What's this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands unclean spirits and they obey him!" Right away the news about him spread throughout the entire region of Galilee.

Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law

After leaving the synagogue, Jesus, James, and John went home with Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed, sick with a fever, and they told Jesus about her at once. He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she served them.

Jesus' ministry spreads

That evening, at sunset, people brought to Jesus those who were sick or demon-possessed. The whole town gathered near the door. He healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases, and he threw out many demons. But he didn't let the demons speak, because they recognized him. Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer. Simon and those with him tracked him down. When they found him, they told him, "Everyone's looking for you!" He replied, "Let's head in the other direction, to the nearby villages, so that I can preach there too. That's why I've come." He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and throwing out demons.

Observation: The only person who might have ever had a right to feel he should (or could) try to fix the world all at once was Jesus. But he didn't! Yes, he healed sick people, drove out demons and ministered to the whole town gathered at the door of the house. But in the morning, without telling anyone, he left the whole crowd waiting while he prayed. When the disciples nervously said, "Everyone is looking for you," Jesus replied, "Let's go somewhere else." He took the long view of God's plans, and of his own place in them.

Application: Verse 34 used language that, in Semitic idiom, implied that Jesus healed everyone who came to him. According to a first century understanding, it included virtually every human ill: he healed "all kinds of diseases" and cast out "many demons." Today, God usually works through people trained in physical and emotional healing—but it's still God at work. What hurt(s) do you bring to Jesus today? Are you open to God's help and healing through today's means?

Faith Groups Discussion: *Imagine for a moment how a modern marketing expert might have planned for Jesus to "capitalize" on the crowds he drew in Capernaum. (He was, after all, the Lord of the universe come to live on earth.) In what ways did Jesus' behavior differ from the advice you imagine him getting? In what ways can you learn from Jesus' example, and adopt his attitude toward "success" and letting God, not popular acclaim, define your true value?*

Prayer: Lord, you know even my most carefully hidden or deeply buried hurts and fears. I ask for your healing touch. I trust you to be at work for my good. Amen.

Outer healing as a sign of inner healing power

Wednesday, March 13

Scripture: Mark 1:40-2:12

A man with a skin disease

A man with a skin disease approached Jesus, fell to his knees, and begged, "If you want, you can make me clean." Incensed, Jesus reached out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do want to. Be clean." Instantly, the skin disease left him, and he was clean. Sternly, Jesus sent him away, saying, "Don't say anything to anyone. Instead, go and show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifice for your cleansing that Moses commanded. This will be a testimony to them." Instead, he went out and started talking freely and spreading the news so that Jesus wasn't able to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, but people came to him from everywhere.

Healing and forgiveness

After a few days, Jesus went back to Capernaum, and people heard that he was at home. So many gathered that there was no longer space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven!" Some legal experts were sitting there, muttering among themselves, "Why does he speak this way? He's insulting God. Only the one God can forgive sins." Jesus immediately recognized what they were discussing, and he said to them, "Why do you fill your minds with these questions? Which is easier—to say to a paralyzed person, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take up your bed, and walk'? But so you will know that the Human One has authority on the earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed, "Get up, take your mat, and go home." Jesus raised him up, and right away he picked up his mat and walked out in front of everybody. They were all amazed and praised God, saying, "We've never seen anything like this!"

Observation: In the first century, a "leper" had one of a variety of visible skin diseases. People thought such people were highly contagious, so they feared and shunned them—but Jesus didn't. Homes excavated in Capernaum show room for maybe 50 people in the "living room." Four men tried to bring their sick friend to Jesus on a stretcher, but the room was full. They got creative! Most houses then had an outer staircase to a roof made of branches and rushes laid over beams and covered with dried mud.

They climbed up, dug through, and lowered their friend to Jesus.

Application: The man would have stayed paralyzed without his four friends' energetic, creative caring. When was the last time you were able to be a "stretcher bearer" for someone else? Who has been a "stretcher bearer" for you? How determined and creative are you willing to be to bring Christ's help to someone you know who needs it?

Faith Group discussion: *Jesus' healing power was most visible when crippled people got up and walked. But Jesus, knowing physical healing wouldn't last forever, linked it to eternal issues. Would it have surprised you to hear Jesus say to the crippled man lowered through the*

roof, “Your sins are forgiven”? What does Jesus’ choice of remedy suggest to you about his “diagnosis”? What connection(s) might exist between forgiving sins and physical healing?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about the well-being of my body and my inner self. Help me to live each day in the beautiful reality of your forgiving, restoring grace. Amen.

Caring for people over rigid rules

Thursday, March 14

Scripture: Mark 2:13-28

Eating with sinners

Jesus went out beside the lake again. The whole crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he continued along, he saw Levi, Alphaeus’ son, sitting at a kiosk for collecting taxes. Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” Levi got up and followed him. Jesus sat down to eat at Levi’s house. Many tax collectors and sinners were eating with Jesus and his disciples. Indeed, many of them had become his followers. When some of the legal experts from among the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, “Why is he eating with sinners and tax collectors?” When Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn’t come to call righteous people, but sinners.”

When to fast

John’s disciples and the Pharisees had a habit of fasting. Some people asked Jesus, “Why do John’s disciples and the Pharisees’ disciples fast, but yours don’t?” Jesus said, “The wedding guests can’t fast while the groom is with them, can they? As long as they have the groom with them, they can’t fast. But the days will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. “No one sews a piece of new, unshrunk cloth on old clothes; otherwise, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and makes a worse tear. No one pours new wine into old leather wineskins; otherwise, the wine would burst the wineskins and the wine would be lost and the wineskins destroyed. But new wine is for new wineskins.”

Scripture and the Sabbath

Jesus went through the wheat fields on the Sabbath. As the disciples made their way, they were picking the heads of wheat. The Pharisees said to Jesus, “Look! Why are they breaking the Sabbath law?” He said to them, “Haven’t you ever read what David did when he was in need, when he and those with him were hungry? During the time when Abiathar was high priest, David went into God’s house and ate the bread of the presence, which only the priests were allowed to eat. He also gave bread to those who were with him.” Then he said, “The Sabbath was created for humans; humans weren’t created for the Sabbath. This is why the Human One is Lord even over the Sabbath.”

Observation: Compare Mark 1:21 with today’s first verse. The synagogues shut Jesus out! There developed a kind of war between Jesus and the guardians of Jewish orthodoxy. Jesus kept doing and saying shocking things. He called a tax collector (who worked for Herod Antipas and/or the Romans) to join him. He said the Kingdom “wine” he brought couldn’t fit the old forms the Pharisees clung to. He said he was Lord even over venerable customs like the laws about proper Sabbath-keeping.

Application: In his commentary on this scripture, N. T. Wright wrote: “Jesus doesn’t deny that the disciples are out of line with traditional Sabbath observance, but he pleads special circumstances and scriptural precedent. He puts himself on a par with King David.... That’s a

pretty heavy claim: the implication is that Jesus is the true king.” In what ways have you already made Jesus the true king of your life? Are there areas where you might expand his reign this Lenten season?

Faith Group Discussion: *It’s tempting to dismiss those first-century Pharisees as narrow and blind, without realizing how easily we become like them. Christian singer Todd Agnew’s song “My Jesus” included these challenging lines: “My Jesus would never be accepted in my church, ‘Cause the blood and dirt on His feet might stain the carpet.” What comfortable customs, habits or assumptions might Jesus challenge in your workplace, neighborhood or church today?*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you upset complacent, “righteous” people, while accepting outcasts like Levi the tax collector. Make me righteous, not in complacency, but in a way that follows you wherever you lead. Amen.

Opposition hardened, but apostles enlisted

Friday, March 15

Scripture: Mark 3:1-19

Healing on the Sabbath

Jesus returned to the synagogue. A man with a withered hand was there. Wanting to bring charges against Jesus, they were watching Jesus closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. He said to the man with the withered hand, “Step up where people can see you.” Then he said to them, “Is it legal on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they said nothing. Looking around at them with anger, deeply grieved at their unyielding hearts, he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he did, and his hand was made healthy. At that, the Pharisees got together with the supporters of Herod to plan how to destroy Jesus.

Healing and throwing demons out

Jesus left with his disciples and went to the lake. A large crowd followed him because they had heard what he was doing. They were from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the area surrounding Tyre and Sidon. Jesus told his disciples to get a small boat ready for him so the crowd wouldn’t crush him. He had healed so many people that everyone who was sick pushed forward so that they could touch him. Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down at his feet and shouted, “You are God’s Son!” But he strictly ordered them not to reveal who he was.

Jesus appoints twelve apostles

Jesus went up on a mountain and called those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve and called them apostles. He appointed them to be with him, to be sent out to preach, and to have authority to throw out demons. He appointed twelve: Peter, a name he gave Simon; James and John, Zebedee’s sons, whom he nicknamed Boanerges, which means “sons of Thunder”; and Andrew; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, Alphaeus’ son; Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean; and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus.

Observation: By Jesus’ day, efforts to uphold the Sabbath (it was the fourth of the Ten Commandments, after all) had led to a complex tangle of rabbinic rules about what was and wasn’t work. Jesus more often defied those rules than obeyed them, as we saw in yesterday’s and today’s readings. The Sabbath rules forbade action to make people well on the holy day, a rule that angered Jesus. His determination to offer healing on the Sabbath led “the righteous” to seek an alliance with the corrupt Herodians to destroy Jesus.

Application: Couldn't Jesus have just told the man to meet him in secret the next day? In this and other stories (Luke 14:1-6, John 5:1-18), it seems that Jesus went out of his way to show that he valued people's well-being more highly than strictly following rules. Of course, we need some level of rules and guidelines. Have you ever faced a situation in which you needed to set aside the rules or guidelines in the interest of meeting human needs?

Faith Group Discussion: William Barclay wrote in his commentary on this scripture: "It is significant that Christianity began with a group. The Christian faith...from the beginning had to be discovered and lived out in a fellowship....the very name Pharisee means 'the separated one;' the essence of Christianity was that it ...presented [people] with the task of living with each other and for each other." We live at a time when there are all kinds of conflict and divisions. How does this principle work today? How, if at all, has shared loyalty to Jesus helped you bridge beliefs or ways of living that might have divided you and another person?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me the boldness to be one of your disciples, and the courage to do what is right even when there's pressure to stay quiet and "go along." Amen.

Jesus undeterred by misunderstandings

Saturday, March 16

Scripture: Mark 3:20-35

Misunderstandings about Jesus

Jesus entered a house. A crowd gathered again so that it was impossible for him and his followers even to eat. When his family heard what was happening, they came to take control of him. They were saying, "He's out of his mind!" The legal experts came down from Jerusalem. Over and over they charged, "He's possessed by Beelzebul. He throws out demons with the authority of the ruler of demons." When Jesus called them together he spoke to them in a parable: "How can Satan throw Satan out? A kingdom involved in civil war will collapse. And a house torn apart by divisions will collapse. If Satan rebels against himself and is divided, then he can't endure. He's done for. No one gets into the house of a strong person and steals anything without first tying up the strong person. Only then can the house be burglarized. I assure you that human beings will be forgiven for everything, for all sins and insults of every kind. But whoever insults the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. That person is guilty of a sin with consequences that last forever." He said this because the legal experts were saying, "He's possessed by an evil spirit." His mother and brothers arrived. They stood outside and sent word to him, calling for him. A crowd was seated around him, and those sent to him said, "Look, your mother, brothers, and sisters are outside looking for you." He replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Looking around at those seated around him in a circle, he said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother, sister, and mother."

Observation: Jesus should have had a perfect family life, right? But Mark said his mother and brothers came to "take control" of him, fearing he'd lost his mental balance. The religious leaders went further, claiming Jesus was in league with the ruler of demons. Jesus' response in verses 29-30 was forceful, but it was an ugly charge: "Attributing the Holy Spirit's work to an impure spirit (v. 30) is roughly tantamount to calling God Satan." And family is important, but on this occasion Jesus reminded his hearers that family is not God. Maybe even without realizing it, some families demand that all family members agree, or avoid embarrassing the family. But Jesus said our highest loyalty is to God and who God calls us to be, even beyond our family.

Application: How could Jesus' mother have so drastically misjudged her son's actions to carry out his mission? Have your parents ever misunderstood you, or you misunderstood your children or siblings? How can you offer wisdom and support to people you love, and yet not try to heavy-handedly control their lives? Jesus was serious about his bond with those who do God's will. How can faith and shared life with God create ties as close as, or closer than, those we share with family? Do you have any added "family members" because you share in God's family? How can giving Jesus your first loyalty make you, in the end, a better family member than ignoring your true self to "get along"?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, it must have hurt to have your family think you were out of your mind. You kept on loving them, even when you had to act in ways they didn't like or understand. Help me find that same balance in my earthly relationships. Amen.