



A Space to Belong

6/6/21 - Holy Eucharist Rite II for the Second Sunday after Pentecost:

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Oh Lord: take our minds and think through them; take our mouths and speak through them; take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen.

We've spent seven of the last eight weeks with the Gospel of John as our guide to the life and power of Jesus.

John who is full of big themes—dark and light, eternal life and eternal damnation; John, whose Jesus refers to himself in metaphors, like “I am the Good Shepherd,” “I am the True Vine,” “I am the Bread of Life;” John, whose Jesus is omniscient and seems in complete control of his divine destiny; John, whose Jesus has a number of lengthy and consequential encounters with individuals, but whose Jesus also engages in such extended and weighty monologues on spiritual truths that it sometimes feels like he is trying to reach seminary-trained pastors and academics, rather than peasants who caught fish, tended sheep, farmed land, or performed day labor.

By contrast, the Gospel of Mark portrays Jesus as a man of action. It is the shortest of the Gospels and the most direct. The narrative is terse, compact, and vivid. Mark's purpose is to show that the kingdom of God is at hand. While Mark's Jesus speaks in parables which can be confounding, he is primarily shown as a man of decisive deeds and obvious emotions. For example: he becomes hungry and tired; he exhibits a full range of feelings, including pity, anger, sadness, wonder, compassion, indignation, love and anguish. Mark's Jesus doesn't know everything; his power is limited. In short, Mark's picture of Jesus is the most human. (And Mark will be our guide to Jesus for most of the Sundays from now until we get to Advent in November.)

One of the places we see this humanity on full display is when Jesus is with his family, as he is in today's Gospel. Jesus' relationship with his family is complex. On the one hand, he teaches the commandments, especially honor your father and mother; from the cross in John's Gospel, he directs the beloved disciple to take care of his mother after he dies. But there are also those places where the edges may show. We may recall at the wedding in Cana, he seems fresh with his mother when she asks him to bring extra wine for the guests. His response sounds basically like, “Whose boss are you?” (John 2.1-11) Or his behavior as a twelve-year-old in the Gospel of Luke, where his response to his anxious parents, who find him in the Temple with teachers after frantically searching for him in Jerusalem for three days, sounds a bit cheeky, like, “Duh, where else would I be?” (Luke 2.41-52)

And this morning, when his family comes to him concerned about his sanity, and likely even his safety, and, in this Middle Eastern context, his damage to the family honor, his response is to redefine the definition of family, in a way that sounds hurtful and cold. Jesus is redefining what it means to belong, in the deepest most profound sense, what it means to belong to God, and to one another. In fact, in a way, all of our readings this morning are about belonging, mistaken or otherwise.

Samuel is beseeched by the Israelites to give them a king, like their powerful neighbors have. Despite Samuel's warning about the exploitative characteristics of kings, they desire the kind of belonging that



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depends on military might and absolute rule, thinking that it will bring them safety. Paul is exhorting his people to build a community of belonging that is committed to reconciliation. He is navigating significant strife in this Corinthian church concerning how to live a faithful Christian life amidst everyday questions about diet, marriage, sex outside of marriage, litigiousness among members, how women should dress, who are reliable teachers, and attitudes toward poorer members of the community. Paul is inviting his people into a community that will understand spiritual unity to be the fruits of reconciliation. The reality of spiritual unity in Jesus is far deeper than any physical unity that meets the eye.

And then there is Jesus in the Gospel this morning. On the one hand, his family is concerned about his sanity and safety, as well as their honor. On the other hand, the religious establishment is concerned that his healings, exorcisms, and teachings about the nature of God are a threat to their control of the religious status quo. Jesus' response these leaders is to eviscerate the logic of the scribes and use it against them. His response to his family is to prioritize relationship with God over traditional social structures based on blood kinship. For Mark, the Christian community acting as surrogate family is the center of Jesus' Good News. It transcends the normal categories of birth, class, race gender, education, wealth, and power. For the Galilean disciples of Mark's story, giving up one's family of origin for the surrogate family, as Mark portrays Jesus doing here, there were unimaginably great rewards, as Jesus says later in the Gospel: 'a hundredfold now in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.' (Mark 10.30) (Social Science Commentary on the Gospels, 202)

Deep belonging. It's what the community that seeks to be faithful to Jesus must promise and deliver. In a season of gatherings for commencements and graduations, when families gather, or don't, we are in a time when we may be particularly aware of the ways that we yearn to belong. As we begin Pride Month, we are reminded that the Church is called to invite the lesbians, gays, and transgender people among us into the full responsibilities and privileges of life with Jesus and in civic society. In a season of heightened awareness of the power of the vote, the Church is called to work for the kind of government that includes the gifts and powers of more, not fewer, people. In these areas and in all areas of our lives, may we continue to ask for God's help to be a place of belonging.

Amen.