

Mark 3:31-35 –Advent 3 Wednesday – Home for the Holidays – December 14, 2022

+In Nomine Iesu+

No other season of the year extols the blessings of home and family quite like Christmas. In fact, if you spend some time watching the Christmas specials this year, you will find a focus on *home* as the essential ingredient in the celebration of the holiday.

We can hear it in the music on the radio, as Frank Sinatra or Michael Bublé sing, *I'll be Home for Christmas*. And thus, we find our way into planes, trains, and automobiles because there's no place like home for the holidays.

This kind of music elicits a yearning to spend the season in the place where we feel most secure and loved. Home is supposed to be that place—cozy, warm, safe, kind. And underlying this sentiment is a longing to feel at home even beyond December 25. And it's not such a misguided desire.

And yet, as a destination, home is elusive. Now, I actually think we have a great deal of God-given power to create the tone of our own homes. But, there are still a bunch of things we cannot control.

Some of us experience pain and conflict caused by other family members. Maybe losses in the family have reshaped our emotional experiences this Christmas. And even those with settled lives and economic wellbeing may still experience an existential longing for something to match the Christmas specials.

At the time of the birth of Jesus, the Jewish people lived with this historic memory of seeking, finding, losing, grieving, and attempting to re-create a sense of home. They knew the stories of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece. And now, their homeland was once again under the domination of a foreign power—this time the Roman Empire—which robbed them of a physical, emotional, and spiritual sense of safety and well-being.

Into all of this disruption, Jesus comes. The Nativity is the celebration of God bringing a new sense of home and family to His people. One of our most cherished texts that comes to us on Christmas Day makes this reality so clear, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The *Word*, of course, is Jesus. *Becoming flesh* is a reference to His incarnation. The word *dwelt* is related to the word for *Tabernacle*. This could just as easily be translated, *He pitched His tent among us*. And in the Old Testament references to the Tabernacle and Temple included calling these places a house. As the Psalmist proclaims, “O LORD, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.”

Our Gospel reading is from Mark again tonight. And while Mark lacks the nostalgic Christmas narratives, it does capture some of these themes through its focus on the kingdom of God. Jesus' preaching begins like this, “Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” Unlike all of the earthly kingdoms, the kingdom of God is not defined geographically.

And thus, when Jesus comes into our world—and into our lives—He comes with the purpose of inviting us to find our place with Him. For Mark, Jesus not only ushers us into the

kingdom, but He also embodies the kingdom. This means when we look at Jesus, we learn what the kingdom of God is like. And quite often, we are a little surprised by what Jesus reveals about the nature of His household.

Take, for instance, the concept of family. The notion of home is usually associated with kinship—those we are immediately related to by blood or by adoption. Jesus talks about two different groups that He calls family—His blood relatives and His spiritual family. And He makes a distinction between them in our reading. He says, “Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

Let’s build some context for all of this. This passage stands at the end of a serious conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus had gathered great crowds at this point, although interestingly, Jesus orders the Twelve to prepare a boat so He could escape their presence. He isn’t all that interested in popularity. He is looking to build faith.

The crowd had gathered because of the signs Jesus worked among them. He healed people, certainly, but Jesus also addressed the unclean spirits. And these spirits, as He cast them out, would announce His identity, “You are the Son of God.” This is a very interesting thing for the spirits to say.

Jesus immediately silences them. He would not allow the spirits to speak of Him. He knew that even when they make accurate statements about Him—unwillingly acknowledging His identity—their intent is still evil. They divulge Jesus’ relation to the Heavenly Father, but they do so to cause misunderstanding. They attempt to interrupt Jesus’ work.

After this in chapter three, Jesus does escape from the crowd and goes up a mountain and He “called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him.” Jesus chooses His followers. This is always the way of things. And here the Twelve are named for the first time.

After all of this, we drop into our reading. Jesus returned home. This is may be a reference to Capernaum, His base of operations during His ministry. Chapter 2 even *calls* Capernaum His home. It could also mean Nazareth. This makes a little sense because of the presence of His family. Wherever He is, the crowd is back with force.

But as we noted, the story revolves around Jesus’ family. And they are concerned. This whole thing seems odd to them. Even after all these years, Jesus is surprising—even strange in their eyes. And notice the irony. People who barely know Jesus are at table fellowship with Him—eagerly listening—finding their place with Him. And His biological family is outside—and they come to put His whole ministry to a stop.

Now, it is likely just His brothers attempting this intervention. Although Mary is present with them at this point. We know much about the faith of Mary—from the Magnificat—to the Nativity—to Jerusalem—to the cross. But His brothers think He is out of His mind. And it is a rather logical deduction based on what Jesus is saying and doing. There are really only two options for how to respond to Jesus. There are always only two.

It reminds me of the old adage from C.S. Lewis as we all try and make sense of Jesus. “Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse...But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Now, maybe this is what your family thinks of you—that you are a little out of your mind—so spiritually minded that you are no earthly good. Too old fashioned about the faith. Too ritualistic or out of touch with the times. That’s true of me with some of my extended family. Christianity looks bad for the world in the eyes of many today.

And so, as Jesus suggests, the presence of the kingdom could even divide families, as some follow Him and some do not. It divides His family. And we talked about this before. Jesus warns, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword...A person's enemies will be those of his own household. 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.”

There is, therefore, nothing higher than the love of Christ. We must love our families, but Jesus still has a higher priority, even when that brings division. Beware of anything that comes before Christ in your life. And Jesus lives what He says. He hears that His family has arrived—to accuse Him of insanity—but He does not let that derail Him from His kingdom work.

Instead, He answers with a question. “Who are my mother and my brothers?” The answer? It is His own disciples—those who do the will of God—those who find their place—their identity—their home with Him. And here we find our baptismal reality as children of God. His truest family is the family of God. And the same is true for us.

Now, let me say that Jesus is not dissolving the nuclear family with His comments here. Remember, that James and Jude—His own brothers—following the resurrection—are going to be pillars in the Church. They are going to even write books in the New Testament. Jesus will come and appear to them—personally to them—and that makes all the difference.

There is some hint, in the words of Jesus in Matthew 22, that family will be different at the resurrection. I guess everything will be different in the resurrection. But until then, the family is the fundamental building block for society. And family has a special place even in the life of the church.

For example, Jesus has harsh words for the Pharisees when they use their own tradition to refuse care for their aging parents. And in 1 Timothy 5, Paul says, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

And that reminds us that things in the family should be done God’s way. We get the privilege of setting the tone of our own homes. And our homes should be places of light and the life of Christ—filled with the Word of God and prayer. Outposts of God’s kingdom on earth. Places of holiness and godliness and hope. They should reflect the realities of the new creation. Don’t divorce your home life from your church life.

And, when it comes to the family, the way of the world isn’t working. Families are a mess out there. Listen to the conversations happening with families at grocery store or on social media. Let’s stop borrowing their traditions. Let’s stop patterning our lives after what everyone else is doing.

And finally, as we get to what Jesus does mean, we see He is providing for His own people through the family of God. We are granted a new identity in Holy Baptism as sons and daughter of God. This means our church family needs to act like church *family*.

As we come to church, we can come as consumers, or we can come as servants. One clarification is absolutely necessary here. As we come *before God* in this place, we come only to receive. Here God is at work bringing us His means of grace. He creates faith. He sustains faith. He forgives our sins. He keeps us steadfast to the end.

But in our relationship with one another, let's show some responsibility—some ownership—some kindness. Let's set the tone of our congregation as a place of safety and warmth—as a place where people feel secure and loved. As Paul says in Galatians 6, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

So, come to church this Christmas prepared to meet with God and to receive His gifts. But come prepared to serve your neighbor here as well. Pay attention to the needs of others—physical, emotional, spiritual. We all have roles to play in this regard. I can't possibly meet the needs of everyone around here. Let's help each other. Be a listening ear. Volunteer. Teach. Serve. Give to those in need. Remind one another of God's Word.

And finally, to build on this implication, the Church needs to be there for us when our families fail. I think this is primarily what is happening in our text. Jesus' family has rejected Him. They falsely accuse Him. They reject the truth—and live with a completely different understanding of good and evil. And this might very well happen in our own families, especially when it comes to matters of faith.

So, let's care for one another. Let's encourage one another in the faith. Let this be a place of spiritual safety and support when our families fail us. And when we fail our families, come here and find absolution. Find the atonement of Christ as He speaks His Word over us. Find grace to set things right.

Jesus says some difficult things. But He is the Word of life. He is our true Brother. We are sons and daughters of the King. His Word transforms our church and our families. And His Nativity—His coming includes calling us into a new family—a new identity. We have safety and security with Him. And we find our true home with Christ in His kingdom which has no end. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+*Soli Deo Gloria*+