

Genesis 3:9-15

Psalm 130

2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1

Mark 3:20-35

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Have any of your relatives ever accused you of being out of your mind? For all who have had that experience, today's Gospel says we are in good company. Personally, I cannot remember being on the receiving end of those exact words, but I have had some looks that conveyed very clearly that same message – most recently from my grandchildren in response to some of my more ridiculous stories and antics. This and other similar accusations, whether in words or by looks, are often bantered among family members light-heartedly or even playfully. But they can become quite serious, as were those directed at Jesus by members of his family in this Gospel.

In the opening line of this reading, we learned that Jesus and his disciples were back home. He had been baptized by John in the Jordan River, tempted by Satan for forty days in the desert, and with his disciples, had traveled extensively throughout Galilee teaching, curing the sick, and driving out evil spirits. His reputation as a teacher and healer had spread rapidly, and crushing crowds were following and surrounding him wherever he went. People from all over Galilee, Judea, and other regions were clamoring for his cures. And as we just heard, these impassioned crowds made it impossible at times for Jesus and his disciples even to eat. But not all in the crowds were followers or supporters of Jesus. Scribes had come from Jerusalem to investigate rumors they had been hearing. These religious leaders felt intimidated by Jesus. They questioned his authority. They said he was possessed and called him “the

prince of demons.” Some in the crowds listened to the scribes and turned against Jesus. The scene became chaotic, and relatives of Jesus in his home town were worried – not so much for Jesus as they were for their own reputations and safety. So, they concluded that he was out of his mind and set out to capture Jesus and remove him from all the turmoil and attention.

What caused the turmoil and brought all this attention to Jesus? In short, he was different, and he defied expectations. This seemingly simple carpenter from Nazareth quoted the Torah and the Prophets. He preached compassion, love, humility, and forgiveness. He touched lepers and dined with known sinners. He slighted certain fasting rules and other pious religious practices. He proclaimed that the kingdom of God is at hand. All this, along with his healings and exorcisms, made Jesus immensely popular with most people, but his actions threatened the authority of religious leaders and he embarrassed some of his family. Consequently, these religious leaders and relatives, in their own ways, were out to get him.

Jesus responded to the aggressions of these two groups in very different ways. To the family members who were trying to capture him to protect their own self-interests, Jesus conveyed the message, “...whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” In this message, Jesus clearly defines kinship with him as a matter of commitment rather than blood or heritage. This undoubtedly shocked his relatives as well as others in a culture where everything revolved around the family, and it remains somewhat shocking to us today. But Jesus' entire ministry was about making the kingdom of God available to everyone. No one has special access

except through accepting his message and putting it into practice.

To the scribes who tried to discredit Jesus with claims that he was demonic, Jesus responded with his harshest statement in any of the Gospels, "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness but is guilty of an everlasting sin." That startling statement seems totally out of character for the one who lived and preached forgiveness. It was a stern rebuke of the scribes who refused to accept that the healing works of Jesus could be by the grace of God. Their hearts and minds were closed. They were so bound by their own religious dogma that they could not see God revealed in Jesus and in his ministry.

These same words that Jesus had for members of his family and for the scribes also call us today to keep our hearts and our minds open to the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives, even when those works of the Spirit may seem unconventional. No matter how confident we may feel about our beliefs and our actions, none of us can know with one hundred percent certainty the will of God. We depend on the Holy Spirit to guide us, and we must also pray for the wisdom to listen and the courage to follow.