

Message: “Your Spiritual Family”¹

“Jesus went home. He named his inner circle of disciples, and he went home. Jesus called it a day. Well, he healed a man on the Sabbath, it turns out, and got into a mess of trouble; and then he called the inner circle and went home.

The last time Jesus was home, someone tore a hole in his roof and lowered a paralyzed man into the living room. Then he called a friend, had a party - got called out for that one too, went on a hike with his new friends, and they plucked some grain from a field they were wandering through, and got in trouble for that (reaping on the Sabbath - not stealing grain, oddly enough); then Jesus healed a man and called his inner circle and went home.

Before that, Jesus got baptized and spent some time alone in the wilderness, cast out some demons, some of whom seemed to recognize him, but he told them to keep quiet about it; and he healed and walked and found need everywhere he went. Jesus tried to go home and lost his roof; he attended a few parties and did the grain thing, the Sabbath thing, called his inner circle and went home.

That’s where we start this week. Jesus went home – except it wasn’t home. Other translations don’t say home. One says he entered a house or the place he was staying. In other gospels, the text says he doesn’t have a home. But maybe that’s after he tried to go. Maybe that is the result of finding that homes aren’t the haven you hoped they would be.

For those of us who move frequently, home is an elusive concept. People often ask me for a hometown. There are lots of markers I can name: place of birth, where I graduated from high school, where we got married, where my parents live, but home? That’s harder. Home is a now thing, though. Jesus went home. And his family tried to restrain him, and his neighbors tried to call him out. Welcome home, Jesus.

Jesus went home and found a family who thought he was crazy. He was used to dealing with those who thought he was crazy. Par for the course these days.

¹ Source: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/when-the-spirit-moves/second-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-preaching-notes>

Mark follows one of his standard literary habits and makes a sandwich story. He starts one story and then interrupts it for another story and then comes back to the story he started.

The family comes in with a straitjacket and prescription drugs to see if they can save Jesus from himself. But before they get there, a battalion of scribes comes marching down the hill from Jerusalem, and the scribes set up siege against the house where Jesus is, pointing fingers and calling names. They brought out the heavy artillery for this one.

Jesus is not just crazy, they shout at people passing by. Jesus is possessed - and not by some low-level demonic presence. He’s got the top dog, the prince of demons - Beelzebul! Whoever that is. A prince, they say. There are a lot of demonic names that have power. They get all mixed up in history.

Anyway, the fighting scribes of Jerusalem are pretty convinced they got him this time. All these things he can do See, that’s the crux of the problem here. Jesus’ reputation is growing – the healing, the teaching. People keep commenting on his authority and the crowds are flocking to his side to hear his words, to reach for his touch, to let his shadow pass over them. The scribes are seeing their ratings, their popularity, dwindle, and they don’t like it. So, they come and set up a press conference outside the house where Jesus is and say, “Sure, he can do all this stuff, fancy stuff, unexplainable stuff, but it is because he is using black magic! He is consorting with demons!”

Notice, they don’t approach Jesus. That doesn’t work so well for them. So, they are trying to attack his reputation instead. If they can just get enough of the crowd to stop and think for a moment, they can chip away at his status.

But Mark says Jesus confronted them. He wouldn’t let them shout from the sidelines. Jesus called them in and then “parabled” them.

Is that a word? No, it isn’t, but it fits. Jesus spoke to them in parables. Now, we think that means he told them stories. A parable is a story, right? Well, that’s how we usually think of them, but not really.

The word parable means “to throw alongside.” Sometimes a story is thrown alongside a question, and we puzzle out an answer, like “Who is my neighbor?” “Someone was going from Jerusalem to Jericho and they fell among robbers.” But sometimes it isn’t a story; it’s an idea or an image. In this case, it’s an argument, a logical discussion that gets thrown alongside the accusations. “He’s working with Satan!”

Think about it, Jesus says, does that make sense? I’m dismantling Satan’s kingdom, threatening Satan’s power. You think I’m working for his team? I’ve tied him up and am plundering what used to be thought of as his house! I’m claiming the treasure he has stolen. I’m taking it back because the treasure which is you. All of you. You really belong to God.

You are a part of God’s family.

That’s when someone remembers they were supposed to tell Jesus about the family that has come for him. “Hey Jesus, your mom is here. Your brothers and sisters are here. They want you. You’ve broken curfew. You’ve soiled the family name. You need to get home and have some sense knocked back into you,” they say.

Jesus smiled and said, “My family is here already.” It sounds mean to our ears. It is as if he was divorcing the group he grew up with, the mother who gave him birth. You don’t count, we hear. You aren’t important. We don’t want to blunt the words too much. There is a hard edge to what he is saying here.

But it isn’t as much a dismissal of family as it is a statement of inclusion. The family, those to whom we owe allegiance and honor and welcome and love, above all love, is not a small circle but an almost unimaginably large one. Anyone who loves God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. That’s the family.

That’s home. We don’t leave home to come to church. We leave one type of home to go home in another sense. Wherever we gather with those who love God, we’re at home. So we should greet one another not with “I’m glad you came,” but with, “Welcome home.”

They called Jesus out at home – his family, those afraid for him, perhaps even afraid of him. They called him out. But Jesus knew, because he understands home and family better than we do. Jesus knew he was safe. Safe at home.

Welcome home. Paul talks about renewal, about the outer nature wasting away while the inner nature is being renewed. This is the same sort of refocusing that Jesus was demonstrating when he went home. Turning the outer to the inner, turning from what is visible to something hidden and yet so much more profound.

We think home is a place of renewal. We think we can go home and rest. And we can, but only if our focus is right. Home won't renew us, won't build us up, unless the focus of our home is on the One who raises us into a new kin-dom, a new reality. Unless it is our true home, “not made with hands but eternal in the heavens.” That's the place of true renewal, of strengthening. And it's available now as it will be in eternity. It is our peace, our grace now and a grace to be shared. A home to be built, here and now with all the people of God.”

Welcome home!

Mark 3:20-35 (CEB)

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.”