

Sermon June 6th 2021

Mark 3.20-end

20and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.' 22And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' 23And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? 24If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

28 'Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin' — 30for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'

31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' 33And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' 34And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! 35Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'

Last weekend our Prime Minister got married – in the Roman Catholic Church – Anglican twitter went into a frenzy about why this was allowed given the stance of the Roman Catholic Church on marriage, fidelity and, well Catholicism. "This isn't the way it is supposed to be". It was all rather too gleeful, if you ask me (and I am no Boris fan).

I personally hope that this was a bold act that will be repeated in many other churches – that allows those who seek to be married in the church to be forgiven and blessed profoundly with God's love...

I wonder what Jesus view on the matter is?

Churches, like all families – can be a tad complicated can't they..?

I wonder about how you get on with your family? Families can be brilliant and supportive – full of love and a safe place to hang out – or a bit of a challenge – or even for some a complete nightmare... many people have a bit of a mix.

Our gospel reading gives us a bit of a peek into Jesus and his family - we have a glimpse into the family dynamics of Jesus. And it feels a bit like 'dramaz'.

Jesus has already begun his pilgrimage, proclaiming the good news through preaching, teaching, and healing. But in verse 21, Mary, along with her other children – were they Jesus' siblings or cousins – the jury is out on that one – but they all march towards Jesus in order to restrain him.

I feel a bit awkward reading this – I mean – restrain in this passage is the same verb used to describe those who lay hands on Jesus in order to arrest him chapter 14 verse 46 if you have a Greek bible to hand!

Why do Jesus' family want to stop Jesus' ministry?

A bit of a clue comes at the beginning of Mark chapter 3 in verse 6 where we can see that the religious and political leaders were planning to kill Jesus. Jesus was essentially a wanted man through his ministry – by preaching and teaching and healing those he lived amongst he was needling the powerful authorities and they were beginning to act against him.

So Jesus' family in this passage are staging an intervention - I suppose if we think about it – Jesus' family are trying to save his life.

It is as if they were saying “This isn't the way it is meant to be”

But Jesus doesn't need saving – he is saviour – it is Jesus who saves his family, not the other way around.

And of course Jesus saves all of us – and we also know that we are his family because he extends a radical and inclusive welcome, a limitless embrace to all of us – we are family (so sang Sister Sledge).

As a mum to adult children I know more than ever that I cannot hold onto my children – for me to be a good parent I must allow my children to grow up in order that they can become fully themselves - all that God has called them to be.

And yet – even now I find myself saying no to things rather than encouraging that movement out – when Dylan talks about moving out – or even worse moving to Australia – I find myself instinctively saying no rather than go....

I'm really interested in that word restrain – because I recognise the motherly feeling – something which describes fear and under the guise of good intentions is yet in opposition to faith.

What are we scared of? There are many fearful people as we venture perhaps tentatively towards a great opening up of our covid reduced lives – how are we

scared for the future? As individuals – in our families? How about in our churches?

I know that there are some terrified churches at the moment – scared they will fail – will people come back to church after being away? Will they survive?

And you know what? Maybe that fear is justified - perhaps the church will never be the same again. Maybe that way of being church pre-covid is coming to an end.

It is easy to want to hold on to what is familiar and scary to accept change. We might even say “This isn’t the way it is meant to be”.

But there is excitement in all of this – we need to remember that resurrection comes only after death – the new is only possible when something old has died...

We have so much to be excited about and I don’t want to be saying to our church – no instead of go – let us be bold in faith as we step out with the life-giving Spirit of God which cannot be restrained.

Later in today’s service we will celebrate Eucharist – which means thank you in Greek – others say communion – emphasising the meaning of at oneness – we have those who say the Lord’s Supper – naming the worship for the bible story remembered and we also have the word ‘Mass’. I wonder if you know what Mass means? Well it comes from the word ‘Missa’ which is related to the word dismissal – which means ‘go’. If we say we are going to Mass we are going to a service which means ‘Go’!

The word mass tells us that this amazing sacramental meal isn’t primarily focussed on the inward nature of the worship itself – the focus is on going — to go out, to live and to love as the body of Christ beyond this meal – to go and to be Jesus’ body in the world – to take the Good News of God’s love out of the church building beyond the safety of the family ...When we meet for Communion, or Eucharist or Mass or the Lord’s Supper we are there to be fed and nurtured so that we can do the real work of being a Christian – church is where we are fed to go and do Jesus’ mission...

We might be a little fearful to be honest of how to ‘go’ – but we are called out - so let us not be restrained and held back by fear (however understandable that might be) but instead let us be liberated and liberators as we share the Gospel of God’s love.

Amen