

“Exorcising Pre-judgment in the Family of God”
based on Mark 3:20-35, David Jahnke, 3/1/15

I mentioned last week that Jesus kept telling people not to talk about his miracles and who he was. Jesus did this because he was getting too much attention. After the leper kept telling people about Jesus healing him, Jesus was no longer able to go into the cities, at least for a while. And if this continued, he would not be able to preach and heal in as many places as necessary before too much trouble came his way.

The trouble had already started because Jesus had offended the good, law-abiding folks by technically working on two different Sabbaths, including a healing at a synagogue in front of them because they had tempted him to do so.

So at the end of last week’s passage, the Pharisees started to conspire against Jesus and put an end to him, due to these infractions along with all of the attention he was getting. So Jesus went back to his house in Capernaum and word about him—good and bad-- had gotten to two different and very important groups. One was his family back in Nazareth who came to get him while he was teaching because they thought he was, quote-unquote, “Out of his mind.” Can you believe his family was worried that he was losing his mind? That they wanted to stop him from carrying out God’s calling to the world? And then at the end of our passage, Jesus won’t even let his family in the door. Their house was divided.

Well, guess who is here today...; my parents. I decided to let them in the door. And hopefully, they do not think I am out of my mind. But at one point, they probably wondered...

Imagine if they had tried to control my vocation when I was 24 and relatively sober for only about a year or so. I was on my way to a foreign land where who knows what would happen to me. “Wouldn’t it be better to just get your teaching degree here David? You will make more money and get better benefits.”

I would never have had the incredible experience of living in a foreign land; immersion in a new culture; learning a new language and what it’s like to be a minority and a foreigner; meeting my wife Hailey!

Imagine if Hailey and/or my family had tried to convince me that going to seminary was not the most practical thing to do at the turn of the 20th century. Arguing as Jesus' family might have, "We are glad that you are interested in God but do you really want to give your life to studying and talking about God in a growingly secular world? And calling others to change their ways and follow God too?" Thank goodness they did not for I love my work and am doing exactly what God wants me to.

So are their ways that we are seeking too much control over those around us? And not letting others live into the freedom that God wants for them? Are there people around us who give us a hard time about our spiritual life and work? What powers and principalities are keeping us from paying more attention to God and doing more for Him?

The other group that Word about Jesus got to was teachers of the Law from Jerusalem. They decided to come see this Law-breaker for themselves. This was the first time they had met him, and they immediately accused him of being possessed by a demon.

Jesus replies that he is only doing good. And that evil comes from Satan which in Hebrew means The Accuser and which teachers of the Law would have known. Here we see Jesus' power to turn judgment back on itself. Because who is wrongly accusing and condemning? Who is really under the power of evil? And who is binding evil for the sake of the good?

I watched a documentary called "The Overnighters" about the economic development in North Dakota due to fracking and the influx of laborers from around the country due to this. Many of them cannot afford the rent or they do not find jobs as quickly as hoped. So a church there was letting them sleep in their church and in their parking lot.

These newcomers are strangers to North Dakota. They are from cultural backgrounds. Many of them struggled to find employment for various reasons and some of them good reasons-- problems with drugs or criminal histories.

Because of this influx and fear, the city passed a law which only lets people to sleep in their cars on someone else's property for 30 days. And the fire department told the city that the church was not up to code to allow people to sleep there, shutting down the program within.

The potential for bad apples led a city to conspire and pre-judge newcomers as a no-good bunch of strangers who were messing things up in their town; kind of like Jesus was a no-good lawbreaker who was messing up a nice tidy order that the powerful had in place of keeping sinners and sick people at a distance.

One of those staying in the church summed up his feelings. “You can be a good man, even a hero but that is not going to be remembered in five years. What goes on the record and is remembered is the bad stuff.”

Jesus’ record is different from the world’s. He told the teachers of the law who were accusing him of blasphemy. “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven all their sins and all the blasphemies they utter.”

This is what all sinners who long for mercy and new life will finally meet in the end. And in the meantime, this is how they are able to live into God’s calling for their lives, despite their past. Even if the world refuses to forgive and forget and give second chances...third, fourth, 77th chances, they can cling to the Word of Jesus that their sins are not remembered by God. They can struggle in this world by the strength of the Holy Spirit to bless others with good works...even if the world rewards them with little to no compensation in return for those blessings.

Jesus points out the greatest danger— blaspheming against the Holy Spirit; the lawyers’ pre-judgment that a demon inside Jesus gave him the power to heal rather than the Holy Spirit.

So the real danger is believing that despite the goodness of others, there is a deeper evil ultimately controlling them. We might not say they are possessed. But accusation and prejudice toward others that ignore or pervert the good things that they do is quite common. And this leads to division and war on small scales— within families and churches— think of the accusation of Jesus’ family-- and on large scales, within and among nations and religions.

I had a Facebook discussion with an old high school friend who was ranting about a couple of women at the Oscars mentioning equal pay for equal work for women. He joked after the show, “Just Great! I can't even sleep! I'm worried about Patricia Arquette and J Lo will get paid enough for their next Hollywood project!” I replied that I did not think they were worried about themselves. “What have any of those self-centered, narcissistic Hollywood liberals done for that cause, or any cause?” I see the exact same thing from the other side, sometimes, with people stereotyping conservatives as money-grubbing people who scorn and do nothing for the poor. Pre-judgment and accusation abounds!

Westerners prejudging Muslims for not condemning radical Islam? Muslims prejudging Israelis, Americans, Jews and Christians as war-mongers. The rich judging the poor and the poor the rich. And I could go on and on...

Jesus comes to all of us and says, "No more! I will not put up with you demonizing my brothers and sisters! And do not presume you know who my brothers and sisters. Whoever does the will of God is my mother and my brother!"

What a hopeful word this is. First all of our misguided and emotional judgments will be forgiven. Second, dare to take on the work of God— forgiving others, cleansing their record, offering them good work. Third, let God be the final judge of who is in His family. Fourth, seek common ground with those who believe differently from us— highlighting the ways that you share in the will of God and are thus brothers and sisters. These are the ways of peace and prosperity for all God's children. This is the effective gospel-sharing and the peace-making that God calls us to... So to the God of all grace who calls us to eternal union with Christ Jesus, be all the power and the glory, now and forevermore.