

Who are my mother and my brothers?

(Mark 3: 20-35)

St. Paul's, Milford

Sunday 14 Jun 2015: 8:00 and 9:30

Today's gospel is not the easiest to follow. Mark records that Jesus calls his twelve disciples and goes home. People then gather around him in great numbers. But some were saying that he'd gone out of his mind. And so his family members are called. We're told they went out to restrain him. The Pharisees, never far away, said that he'd been overtaken by demons. But then Jesus asked them, Look if I've been overtaken by Satan you could hardly expect me to order Satan to leave me!

We then go on a few verses and then there's a puzzling exchange between Jesus and his family over who his brothers and sisters and mother were

C.S. Lewis wrote in his book "Mere Christianity" that we must see Jesus as either Liar, Lunatic, or Lord. It's a question that was raised over 2000 years ago when the Pharisees said he was possessed by demons and therefore was a Liar about being Lord, his family was there because they said Jesus was out of His mind, Lunatic... but Jesus showed them was Lord. We have to ask ourselves who we believe He is: Liar, Lunatic, or Lord...

Not the easiest passage to deal with. But we must try. I really want to focus on the bit at the end but we need to take note of the scene. There were some in the crowd who were laughing at Jesus. But then they did that later on when he hung on the cross – they jeered, they scorned. Called him mad. He'd upset the religious leaders – but then that was to happen many times. The sad thing is that they were laughing at Jesus. Jesus the joke, Jesus the sideshow, Jesus the crazy man. And we might think: if that's the case, where does that leave us?

Was Jesus making a spectacle of himself? After all, they sent for his family and they came around. Jesus the spectacle. That's not the image many of us have of Jesus. Jesus the good shepherd? Yes. Jesus surrounded by children? Yes. Jesus the story teller. Jesus the baby, being held by his mother. Jesus sitting on the throne of heaven. But this Jesus is seen to be out of his mind. This Jesus is perhaps even an embarrassment to his family. Now it's not clear what the people actually thought. And it's not clear how many of them felt this way. But whatever the case it's clear that his family were a bit embarrassed. And it's this encounter between Jesus and his family I want to look at. Now we might think:

they should have known better. If anyone should have understood him, it was his family. So why didn't they understand? If those closest to him couldn't see that he was the Son of God, what change for the rest of us?

They should have known better? The version I'm using says: When his family heard it they went out to restrain him for people were saying 'He has gone out of his mind.' Another version says: 'they came to take control of him.' Jesus is out of control. It's embarrassing. Had Jesus taken leave of his senses? That's what they were thinking.

There was a film *Twelve Monkeys*, which I never saw or knew anything about. But in it there's a statement: There's no right, there's no wrong, there's only popular opinion. And that, as we know, can be a very fickle thing. I'm told that a lot of people when they vote actually vote for the person they think is going to win rather than voting for the person or party they prefer! Others vote for the people whose names they know! Or perhaps those at the head of the list. Voting for the favourite, voting for a name, voting for ABC rather than XYZ, scarcely the basis for a healthy democracy!

In this passage Jesus' family responds to public opinion. That's why they felt the need to control him, to bring him into line. The family, the crowd, the religious establishment, they lacked the tools with which to assess Jesus.

The fact of the matter is that Jesus is the only one with a clear understanding of what's going on. All the others were blinded with cultural biases, with limited insights, with what was comfortable and acceptable. But Jesus has a vision of a Kingdom that hasn't yet arrived, of a family that has nothing to do with names or genealogy. Jesus is up to something new. Not just accepting the world into which he came. Jesus is introducing something new, and that's not always welcome. Jesus is giving them a glimpse of a new way of looking at life and most of them find it unacceptable. Jesus has the power to change and that makes them anxious. That makes him a threat. And so they call him crazy. Get someone to control him, to restrain him!

When we – and by that I mean I or you, an individual – invite Jesus into our lives, we take a risk. A risk that his vision for us might be different from the one we already have, and about which we're possibly very comfortable. This new vision might even seem crazy, risky, dangerous – unless we're looking at it through Jesus' eyes.

Right at the end of the passage, Jesus asks what seems like a pretty obvious question: Who are my mother and my brothers? It seems obvious to everyone because three they were, standing outside his front door and the crowd knows they are there. But that wasn't Jesus' answer. He was looking beyond his own nuclear family, he was looking behind the crowd, looking behind public opinion. Looking beyond all these assumptions, looking beyond the way things are. To a new kingdom, a new way of living, to things as they could be.

Things were changing. History tells us there was a great ferment at the time. People were searching. Jesus knew. He was ushering in something new. The people didn't understand. His family didn't understand. They thought he was crazy or possessed. But he was a prophet. Now a prophet is someone who can see the signs, who can look at the present and see the shape of the future.

And in this new world the family is re-defined. Not by blood lines but, if you like, by Jesus' blood. Jesus announced what he called a new kingdom, what people today sometimes refer to as an upside-down kingdom, where values are reversed, where the old order is replaced by the new. Like the Magnificat: *He filled the hungry with good things and the rich he sent empty away. You have cast down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.* That kingdom has been inaugurated, but it has not been fully realised. It's still breaking in.

To be honest, the way in which Jesus chose his inner core would raise eyebrows. The twelve disciples were a very mixed group. I wouldn't want a vestry like this lot! All kinds of beliefs and opinions. A tax collector like Matthew and a fanatical nationalist like Simon – they wouldn't be seen in the same room! One a collaborator, the other a freedom fighter. They must have hated one another like poison! But they were bound together by a common loyalty. It must have been the same in the war – all sorts of people from all strata of society gathered together in a single platoon. Different backgrounds, different walks of life and yet if they're long enough together they'll be moulded into a band of comrades. Men like them can become friends of each other when they share a common goal, or a common master.

And this kingdom to which we are called. It's not a picture of serenity. It looks and sounds a little crazy. It is out of control (our control). It's breaking into a hostile world. And it's inviting us to join the family, the new family. As the last verse says: 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'