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Mark 3:20-35
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Growing up,

- we moved about every six years,
 - and we never lived closer than 2 or 3 hours to any of our extended family.
- Cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents,
 - they were all folks that I saw at most once or twice a year -
 - and when my family moved from the southeast
 - to a suburb of Chicago, -
 - it meant that I went years without seeing
 - some members of the family -
- which meant that for me,
 - family meant -
 - my parents, brother, and sister -
 - and those people I considered very close friends.
- I was fortunate to have a good group of friends around me in high school,
 - people I came to consider family -
 - but if you are doing the math,
 - you've probably figured out that

- as I graduated from high school,
- my family was set to move again -
- I was going to the University of South Carolina for college,
- and my folk were moving back to the Southeast -
- which meant that when I left Batavia, Illinois -
- there was a good chance that I would never see -
- any of my high school family again.
- So when the opportunity came for me -
- to have one last gathering with all my friends from high school -
- before we moved,
- I was pretty excited.
- Everyone from the group I hung out with would be there
- It would be a chance to say
- one last goodbye -
- And then my mother informed me -
- that we weren't going to be in Batavia on the day in question after all,
- because we were going to a family event -
- to see extended family that we hadn't seen in years.
- Now as you might imagine -
- the new plan didn't exactly sit well with teenage me - -
- and I have never forgotten the conversation my mother and I had that day -
- "Why" I asked

“is it more important to be in there, than to be in Batavia?”

- “Because,” she said,

- “we need to spend time with our family.”

- “Mom”

- I said

“I hardly know those folks.

- I understand that we are related by blood,

- but as far as I’m concerned -

- my friends here are my family.

- If I have to chose,

- I’d much rather be here

- with my family

- than there with people

- I barely know.”

I wouldn’t have used these words at the time,

- but I was answering the question

- “Who is my family?

- And in my way of thinking,

- blood alone wasn’t enough to answer that question -

- I appreciated that I had extended family

- that loved and cared about me -

- I knew there was a connection we shared,

- but I just didn't know them very well and in my way of thinking,
- family was about something more than just biology. -
- Family was about shared experience and daily life.
- Family was about relationship and caring
- Family was about common purpose
- and belief.

- In hindsight,

- I'm sure my words that day were painful for my mother to hear, -

- but

- my mother knew that my high school friends

- were an important part of our family,

- not just my family, our family - -

- these were folks some of whom had

- practically lived at our house -

- this was a part of our family

- that we might never see again.

- And while my parents and I never really discussed the issue further,

- when the day of the party arrived,

- we were in Batavia,

- so I could spend one last day

- with my high school family - -

Interestingly enough, -

- as I think back about that time in my life, -
- that have almost no memory of that one last gathering
- with my high school family.
- beyond a picture of folks on the stairs in our house - -
- As important as I thought it was for me to be present,
- other than the folks in the picture,
- I can't tell you exactly who was there or what we did,
- but -
- my parent's affirmation -
- that family is something more than just biology, - -
- well that idea -
- has remained with me -
- Which is probably why I was drawn to the end of the story-
- that we hear today in the Gospel of Mark
- about Jesus and his family.
- For in this brief interaction, -
- Jesus makes it clear -
- that in his mind, -
- in God's kingdom, -
- family is about something more
- than biology.
- According to Jesus,

- Family to him
- is 'whoever does the will of God.' (Mark 3:35)
- Now somehow,
 - I imagine that Jesus' mother, Mary,
 - may not have been quite as understanding of Jesus' declaration about family-
 - as my mother was during our conversation all those years ago-
 - After all,
 - Mary, Jesus' brothers and sisters weren't simply dropping by for a visit -
 - word had reached them that Jesus was
 - in trouble -
 - the crowds were getting so large that people
 - could barely move -
 - people -
 - important people,
 - were talking about Jesus -
 - suggesting that Jesus was possibly possessed
 - by a demon - -
 - So my guess is that out of love and concern,
 - Mary, along with Jesus' brothers and sisters,
 - came to talk some sense into Jesus -
 - came to bring him home -
 - where his family could take care of him,

- but Jesus wanted no part of this intervention, -
 - Jesus knew that he was exactly where he needed to be -
 - and Jesus rejected the notion -
 - that these people around him -
 - with whom he shared
 - a common purpose and belief in God,
 - were not his family - -
- “Who are my mother and my brothers?”
 - Jesus asks the crowd -
 - “Here are my mother and my brothers!
 - Whoever does the will of God
 - is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mk 3:33-35)
- Now Mark doesn’t tell us -
 - how Jesus’ mother, brothers and sisters -
 - reacted to Jesus’ statement,
 - but for me -
 - Jesus’ words are a powerful reminder -
 - of the good news that God’s family
 - that our family
 - includes all people -
 - who follow God -
 - Jesus’ words are a powerful reminder -

- that when it comes to God's family,

- earthy divisions don't matter - -

- As a Pastor Derwin Gray said

- in a book I was reading this week,

“There is no favored ethnicity, class, or gender in God's church;

- we are equal in Christ, thus we are equally beloved.”

(Building a Multiethnic Church: A Gospel Vision of Grace, Love, and Reconciliation in a Divided World by Derwin L. Gray -

<https://a.co/8vW4F6J>)

- Oh - make no mistake - -

- we live in a very divided world -

- we have divided ourselves by race and culture -

- we are divided by economics and geography -

- we are divided by language and politics - -

- We define ourselves and define each other as

- as Republicans or Democrats or Independents.

- as White or Black or Brown

- or by our gender or sexual identity -

- We see Country folk or city folk or suburban folks.

- Native Virginians or transplants.

We call ourselves Lutherans or Catholics or Methodist

- Muslims or Jews or Hindus

- Atheists or Agnostics or non-religious.

- Those are just some of the lens through which we see ourselves and others,

- But I'm convinced Jesus sees all of who we are -
 - and focuses not on what we would call divisions,
 - but instead on the beauty
 - when all of that diversity comes together
 - to form the body of Christ.
- For as Jesus says today
 - whoever does the will of God -
 - is a part of God's family - -
 - is a part of the body of Christ
- According to Jesus,
 - God's family is about something more than just biology. -
 - It doesn't matter what your family of origin is
 - It doesn't matter what color your skin is.
 - It doesn't matter how rich or poor you may be
 - It doesn't matter what your religious background is -
 - for God's family isn't limited or defined -
 - by human divisions.
 - No - - God's family is inclusive of all God's children. -
 - God's family includes people who annoy you -
 - and people who voted for the other candidate -
 - God's family includes people who speak different languages -
 - and people who dress in clothes you think are unusual or strange.

- God's family includes people who root for your team

- and people who root against your team.

- God's family includes blood relatives -

- and people you have never and will never meet - -

- for as Jesus makes clear,

- God's family of faith isn't defined

- by human categories -

And while I think we all know -

- that being family doesn't necessarily mean that things are easy -

- I hope that Jesus' broad definition of family -

- I hope that Jesus' openness to calling all people

- who do the will of God -

- siblings in Christ -

- helps us to see all our neighbors as members

- or potential members of God's family, of our family, -

- and in the process encourages us

- to treat one another with the love and caring

- that Jesus shows to us

- and that healthy families shows to one another. -