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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
2nd Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 5/Year B
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Text: Mark 3: 20-35

Today's gospel reminded me of a situation in my own family. My siblings and I grew up fairly close to a certain set of cousins. Our families spent quite a bit of time together, especially during the summer months when we caravanned down South to visit other relatives. The oldest cousin of the bunch, who I will call "Brandon," was what we called a 'brainiac' or as some would say, a nerd. But Brandon was also a lot of fun. Years passed and while the rest of us kept in touch, relationships with Brandon changed. Call it 'those teenage years' or not, Brandon seemed to withdraw from everyone. By the time Brandon graduated from MIT (which my aunt and uncle paid for in addition to having received scholarships), he really wasn't speaking much to anyone, not his younger brother or two sisters, except on the occasional holiday. So imagine my surprise, the shock, when he showed up in Emmitsburg where I was finishing up my novitiate. I could tell something was off about Brandon, the look in his eyes, the unanswered or half answered answers to my gentle questioning. The whole conversation. He had changed. Something was different. Something was wrong. I remember calling my aunt and saying, "You won't believe who came to visit me today" and hearing the sound of sadness in her voice for it had been a couple of years since she had last seen or heard from him. And that was the last time I saw him. There were so many questions all of us wanted to ask because this is not the Brandon we know. Why was Brandon behaving this way? Was he depressed? Angry? What could we, as siblings, parents, aunts, cousins have done differently? Do differently in the future? But before anyone knew it, Brandon, was no longer on the radar. Numerous emails and phone calls went unanswered. When my aunt died in 2004 while I was still in seminary, his sisters searched and searched for him. No one was able to contact him. And when his brother passed away just a couple of years ago, again, no one was able to reach him. Even Goggle comes up short. What happened to this once vibrant and nerdy and loveable cousin, we may never know. Still, we hold him in our hearts.

In today's lesson Jesus has returned home. Much has happened up to this point. He has been a man on a mission, traveling from one place to the other preaching and teaching people about God and the kingdom of God.

He has chosen disciples. He has cast out unclean spirits and healed people of their ailments. He has even eaten with tax collectors and kept company with sinners. It is no wonder that crowds have been relentless as they flocked to see him. They have followed him everywhere even home where it difficult for him to have a moment to himself. He cannot even eat in peace!

And as Jesus grew in popularity, his critics were not far behind. The religious leaders did not know what to make of him for his teaching was unlike anything they had ever heard before. Jesus taught a different way of being in relationship with God that did not conform to structures or regulations or even the Law that he knew so well. He even dared to violate the Sabbath in their eyes and at one point Jesus had called himself the Lord of the Sabbath. He just did not fit their mode of doing things. And so the word was put out that “He is insane.” ‘This Jesus is crazy. Has he lost it? He has changed and he is nuts. He is evil and a threat. He may even be possessed!’ So word was sent to his family to come and restrain him.

When his family arrived they found that the place where he was and it was packed. People were standing in the doorway and spilling out into the streets straining to see him and hear his every word, hoping to be healed and made whole. There was no way to get near him because of the size of the crowd so his family sent word, ‘Tell the Teacher that his family is outside and they are looking for him.’ But when Jesus got the message, he said “*Who are my mother and my brothers? Then looking around the crowd, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”* Well, we can only imagine the look on the faces of his kinsfolk!

Jesus’ words seem strong, cutting, and rather harsh. But as Jesus was known to do, he was unraveling and unbinding the restraints, the boxes, that the pious and the so-called learned dared to keep him and God in. He does not deny the relationship he has with his biological family instead he has expanded and re-framed the image of family to mean the inclusion of ALL persons into the family of God. To be ‘family’ now comes to mean more than blood relationship, township or heritage. When Jesus declared, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother,” he definitely challenged the culture in which he lived. No longer was it enough to say that one was close to God because one is a descendant of Abraham. To be family no longer held limitations but *accessibility* to a gracious God who was and is always ready and willing to love and gather all of humanity

into God's arms. And that for Jesus meant God's family was being redefined to include those who gathered about him: the poor, the sick, the hungry, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the unwashed, the mentally and physically challenged, the sinners, the misfits, and all manner of outcasts. Jesus embraced ALL that day. He included them as part of God's family. Us too.

We have all hear the saying, 'Blood is thicker than water,' but Jesus is declaring something deeper and something that goes beyond bloodlines. It is easy enough to be like those religious leaders who dotted every 'I' and crossed every 'T' and decided who is in and who is out. But Jesus says it does not matter who our fathers and mothers are. It does not matter how we identify ourselves- if we are male or female, black, white, or whatever...we are first, children of God, and sisters and brothers in Christ. We are of one family, God's family, family where we see and embrace others as God sees and embraces us. Family who are to embrace others with the same intense love that God has for each and every one of us. And by our baptisms we are to set our exclusive behaviors aside and broaden our concept of family as Jesus did.

In his book, "God Has A Dream", retired Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote:

"Dear Child of God, before we can become God's partners, we must know what God wants for us... "I have a dream," God says... I have a dream that swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, that My children will know that they are members of one family, the human family, God's family, My family...."

*"You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them. Perhaps if we could, we might have chosen different brothers and sisters. Fortunately or unfortunately we can't. We have them and they have us. And no matter how your brother may be, you can't renounce him. He may be a murderer or worse, but he remains forever your brother. Can you imagine what would happen in this world if we accepted that fact about ourselves-that whether we like it or not we are members of one family?"**

Will the world ever take hold of this concept-that all of us belong to God's one family? Will we ever as a world, nation, city, Church, as individuals live up to this notion that all are equals, sisters and brothers, in

God's eyes? That we are responsible for one another? That all peoples are worthy of respect and dignity? That there is a place for all of us?

Perhaps if we truly realized God's dream and plan then there would be a home for those who seek refuge and no child would be separated from their family.

Perhaps if we truly realized God's dream and plan then no person would ever be ousted or put down by family members and friends because of who they love.

Perhaps if we truly realized God's dream and plan then Black Lives/All Lives would matter.

If we really realized God's dream and plan then people wouldn't be waiting months later to rebuild cities and homes destroyed by floods and hurricanes. Months and years later no one would be waiting for clean water to flow in their homes. There would be less and less who go uneducated or hungry. And perhaps no one who struggles with addiction and/or depression would walk their journey alone.

Others thought that Jesus was crazy when he only wanted to make God's all-encompassing love known. But he does not mind because before it is all over, he will stretch out his arms on the cross to show the true depth of his love. That was crazy love!

Who is his family? Those who do the will of God. Let you and I be counted as members of the family.

As we continue this liturgy and go about our day and the week, let us pause and remember our patron, St. Barnabas, whose feast day is tomorrow. Barnabas was one of the earliest witnesses of the Jesus Movement and was so dedicated that he sold his possessions for the sake of spreading the gospel. Let us be encouraged, like him that we may continue to boldly shine the light of our Savior Jesus Christ in the city of Florissant and wherever we go and invite others into God's family of love. Amen.

*excerpts taken from God Has A Dream by Archbishop Desmond Tutu

