

Sunday between 5th and 11th June [10]

Mark 3:20-35

Our readings today are bursting with meaning and sub meaning, so much so that's it's difficult to know where to begin. We could follow the route of trying to understand Jesus' work of driving out demons living as we do at a time when that sort of language and imagery is no longer used. Likewise, we could dwell on what it means when Jesus says that in order for the demons to come the owner of the house, the body, must be first subdued.

But for today let us dwell on Jesus' relationship with his family in our gospel reading, and to do that we should begin with St Paul's 2nd letter to the church in Corinth. St Paul speaks to each of us as clearly as he speaks to the Corinthians when he tells us that if we believe we speak out. He reminds us that our troubles in this world are short lived provided we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen and therefore eternal. Paul speaks comfort and challenge all at one with this letter. Comfort because he tells us that by the abounding grace of God we are already chosen to be brought into God's presence, but challenge because we have to accept that grace and live within it which will cause us to speak out for Christ, to stand up and be counted in a world which will often not be listening and sometimes will be downright hostile to it.

It's not easy to go against the crowd. Even with our deeply held faith it can sometimes be a challenge too great for us to share that faith with confidence. It is no accident that this theme sits in our readings this morning, towards the beginning of the season of Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit which gave confidence and utterance to the disciples as the same Holy Spirit gifted to us at baptism, confirmation and indeed day by day as we re-call God into our lives through prayer. We need not fear the opinions of others because within ourselves dwells the Spirit of God most high. That's Paul's message, but it's easier said than done.

Jesus, in the gospel this morning, shows us that we are not alone in sometimes being misunderstood or lacking support from those closest to us. In Mark's account Jesus had just chosen the 12 disciples, he was no longer working but rather he was drawing a lot of attention to himself preaching and healing the sick. He had an instant crowd everywhere he went as he travelled with the 12 and as we know a sort of hubbub in a small town gets people out to come and have a look for themselves at what the excitement is all about. So, it's no wonder really that Jesus was quickly making a name for himself, especially as those who heard him were inspired and changed.

Jesus' family knew him just as Jesus, he was just the son or the brother that they had known from the beginning, nothing special, not really different from anyone else, except in the usual way that we are all a bit different and quirky, and here he was telling people how to live. They must have thought he was either delusional or else perhaps they also believed he was possessed. In any case, it was only natural that they went to him to take him home, where he could see who he was, forget these delusions of grandeur and be safe from the criticism of the Jewish leaders and the

blasphemy laws. Jesus' family would have been all too aware that if you start talking about God publicly and in new ways, there was a good chance you would fall foul of the Pharisees which of course Jesus did.

So, it seems Jesus' family were perhaps a bit confused by his early ministry, maybe even a bit embarrassed about the attention he was drawing, and certainly they were concerned for his safety. They arrive at the place where Jesus is and send a message for him to go home and he has a choice. It is almost like another wilderness temptation. Come home with us, they say, we can forget this ever happened, leave this preaching behind and get on with your life, this will not end well. And wouldn't that have been the easiest thing for Jesus to do? He could have said, I must go with my family and no one would have thought that was odd, and his ministry could have drawn to a close. But Jesus chose to resist this temptation too, he knew his calling, his purpose, and if those closest relatives couldn't support it then as cold as it might seem he had to shun them in order to stay focussed on the mission. The gospels and acts go on to show how Jesus' earthly family stuck by him and were core members of the early church, but I don't think for one moment that if they hadn't received the gospel that Jesus would have laid down his ministry for their sakes, he couldn't have, this work of his was too important, it was a matter of life and death for him.

This example offers an even greater challenge to us than St Paul. Jesus not only shows us that we must speak out, he shows us that in speaking out we may experience a heavy personal burden. However, by faith, perhaps we can also look at Jesus' family and pray for those in our own lives who have yet to come to faith and trust in the Lord but by grace they too may come to receive the good news. However we manage our concerns, one thing is clear, we cannot deny God. Not because there is some scary punishment if we do so but because once God is in our lives it is painful for us to deny him. Once we have let the spirit in He is our constant companion, and whatever difficulties may present themselves in our lives, we are looking beyond them to our relationship with God in the spirit which is eternal.

If we struggle with the examples we are offered in scripture then we would perhaps be better off looking closer to home, at those in our own church family who manage to shine out as guiding lights of the gospel. We have no shortage of them in our parish community and in our wider community. There are people in our lives, examples of the faith to us, who have been willing to speak up. You don't have to be a big 'S' saint to inspire people by faith. Each time we see someone live out their God given calling, we can be inspired. Each time we hear a testimony of a fellow member of the Body of Christ who has planted seeds of faith that have begun to bear fruit, we can be inspired. Each time we become aware of a prayer answered within our community, we can be inspired. There is no shortage of God's hand at work amongst us, we just need to look for it and recognise it for what it is, little moments that can change our life's direction, seemingly small things that put faith and God before self. And if we see it in our community, perhaps we, too, are an inspiration to someone else.

Let us be inspired today then to speak out, live by faith and let the spirit be seen and heard in us.