

**TEXT: Mark 3:20-35**

**TOPIC: As Jesus redefines family, his biological family and religious authorities express concerns.**

**SUBJECT: We have many families and many homes but what makes family a family is when they help heal.**

**TITLE: The Healing Place**

When I attended Leadership Institute at Church of the Resurrection a few years ago, one of the speakers suggested the importance of clergy identifying four groups of people:

- Those who mentor them.
- Those who care about them as people more than the mission of the church.
- Those who care more about the mission of the church more than them as leaders.
- And those they mentor.

Since then, I've recategorized these groups a little differently. I tend to keep my circles small, so I have my mentors and go-to friends in one circle; they are my healing place. Then, there are those I look to who are invested in the vision and mission of the church. The third are those who look to me for mentoring. I care about each group. Each one is something of a family to me.

But let's see which one you think stands above the rest for me? *Any guesses?*

If you guessed my mentors and go-to friends, you're right. They provide me with a healing place, which is something of an emotional home away from home for me and an emotional home away from home grounds me.

In today's gospel, I think Jesus finds himself in circumstances that may be somewhat similar when people come to him seeking a healing place, and everyone needs a healing place. Everyone. So, as Jesus goes about healing people, he announces that the Kin-dom of God is at hand. As Jesus heals people, the healing place he is creating provides a home away from home

for people who may not have families, who then become family. Jesus heals people who were likely sick because of the oppression of the Roman Empire. Poverty destroys people's health.

By providing a healing place, Jesus is ignoring all the taboos of his culture and society. He heals women. He heals on the Sabbath. He heals children. His healings are highly visible and they give hope to the poor and scare the dickens out of the privileged elite. The healing place Jesus provides is so profound it's overwhelming, even to the point he can't get a bite to eat.

This gets the attention of his family. As the oldest, Jesus would have been expected to stay home when he was out gallivanting around the countryside as a self-anointed prophet. Maybe they thought he should have been confronting Roman oppression, but whichever it was, they thought he was out of his mind. Maybe his family didn't like that his gallivanting was embarrassing or even putting them at risk of having the Empire strike back, and the Empire always strikes back.

The healing place Jesus offered also wasn't lost on the legal experts who came from Jerusalem, not to ask questions, but as critics of Jesus' ministry. So, they labeled him. They claimed he was possessed by Beelzebul only to dream up stuff that made no sense whatsoever. Their "word soup" attacks against Jesus didn't make any sense; that's why Jesus asks: "How can Satan be against Satan?" He points out that a house divided will fall. In other words, a house divided is incapable of being a healing place because it cannot offer a gracious place.

When Jesus said those who are his family are those who do the will of God, what Jesus is saying both with his mother and brothers, and the Judean authorities is not that they're excluded from that, but that he's willing to roll out the welcoming carpet provided they'll dedicate themselves to doing God's will. It's as if Jesus is saying they could be part of the family

in the healing place if the will of God became their priority rather than their misguided labels and attempts to define Jesus and his followers. Instead of thinking of Jesus as someone who'd gone crazy or who was under the influence of a demon – which meant the same thing in Jesus' time – perhaps Jesus' family and the Judean authorities could have experienced the power of Jesus' insights or the transformation of Jesus' healing ministry.

So often, I think one challenge for the church and for society is that people like to define and confine Jesus to being what they want him to be. People like to categorize Jesus, just like they like categorizing what's "good" and "bad." When Jesus – or others – don't fit into those categorizations, people typically label them as abnormal, deviant, crazy or possessed.

Our gospel reading is a story about Jesus and his families – biological and religious families – and as I approached this reading this week, it made me wrestle with what family is. So, what is family to you? Is your definition of family limited in some way. Jesus suggests that when your family provides a place of healing because it sticks to God's ways, you're home.

My favorite movie is Patch Adams, and at the end of the movie Patch is on trial for operating an illegal medical clinic, but what he was doing was operating a clinic where everyone who came to the residence was a patient and everyone who was there was also a doctor. I think Patch Adam's description that identifies patients and doctors as the same people is the best explanation of what Jesus is doing when he calls those seated around him who are doing the will of God his family. I think it's the best description of what every church should be. Our primary task should be rolling out the red carpet, so people find their own healing place, a place that fits into their description and need of home. Our task, like Jesus' is to redefine family.

As I have searched for an understanding of home, I've realized family falls into different categories. Family are those friends, mentors, and mentees who provide me a healing place.

All this suggests that we should always let the good news shake us up and upend every limitation we've attached to home. After all, our loyalties basically boil down to what we define as good. For me and I think for those who are my family – my healing place for this wounded healer – the good is just what Jesus says it is: It is doing the will of God both in word and deed. What matters is that I always let those qualities – doing the will of God in word and deed – rise far above pride, comfort, success and even the selfish notions of salvation.

As residents of the healing place, our task is to make it a place of healing for everyone: the poor, the sick, the broken-hearted, the mourning, the wounded, the widow, family members, and even those who stopped coming with questions only to bring accusations. Why? Because that's what Jesus said and it's what Jesus did. Our task is no different.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.