

*Jesus Came
For The Church, His Family*

Mark 3:13-35

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There is an icon of contemporary North America society that I discovered recently.
And to tell you about that, I have to make a confession.
I've joined the world of social media - I'm on Facebook.

In Facebook you get connected with other people by requesting to be linked to them. And they get to choose whether to respond or not. You can exclude them from your Facebook world if you want.



I found that when I get a "friend" request, up pops this amazing little icon called **<ignore>**. I can push it.
It zaps that person into Facebook oblivion.
And I don't have to deal with 'em ever again.

I can ignore anyone I choose to ignore.
I welcome in only those I want to let into my world.
Only I decide. And only I know what decisions I make.

The **<IGNORE>** button.
I suggest to you that it is a powerful icon of contemporary North American society.

Any social watcher today will tell you that we live in an era of anti-institutionalism.
Condemning, ignoring, and walking away from anything that seems to be organized.

Anything with a set of rules.
Anything with a defined leadership.

As a result, membership in organizations is dropping all over the country - from Rotary clubs to the Legion to lodges to youth wings in political parties.

Some of this is because of well-deserved cynicism.

There has been institutional abuse all over the place.

Politics, education, religion, medicine, family - fallible human beings fall prey to the temptation of power and abusing others for their own gratification or titillation.

And when we witness or experience such, we can't really be blamed for wanting to turn our backs and walk away.

But here's the deal.
I don't think that's the whole story. There's more.

I suggest to you that part of North America's disowning institutions is a logical extension of the religion of individualism;

It's "*me-first*" thinking gone septic.

It's wanting that **<IGNORE>** button close at hand in every corner of my life and not wanting some group or society or institution to cramp my style or dictate to me who I connect with or what I do or when.

I don't want to lose my privacy or independence or control of life on **my** terms.

So we condemn the group and walk away.
We hit our personal little **<IGNORE>** button.

And I want to suggest that doing so runs SMACK against the trajectory of the bible passage we're about to read.

Here's today's road map:

We're going to Mark chapter 3, and will discover the embryonic history of the Church.

Who started it.

And what it was meant to be.

Then we're going to reflect together on how that could potentially shape our attitudes towards the peculiar entity that is being condemned left right and centre today - the Church.

Follow along with Cathy, please.

Mark 3:13-35, p.37 (New Testament)

We're in the opening chapter of Jesus' public ministry. A swirl of activity.

In the midst of the frenzy, Jesus goes up **the** mountain.

Notice that it is not named - it's an allusion to Mt.Sinai, where Moses went up and where God's Old Testament people of Israel were constituted as a nation with God's law.

And there, on **the** mountain, Jesus appoints 12 apostles.

Apostle means "*sent one*" - they are the ones charged with spreading the Good News about Jesus. Twelve of 'em.

Just like the twelve tribes of Israel.

No accident!

This is the **instituting** of the new people of God!!

Lots of people don't get it - including his biological family. They try to stop him.

And then, surrounded by a motley crew of second-string people who had been attracted to him,
who did NOT bad-mouth him,
who had been healed by him,

Yes, surrounded by what was generally a bunch of losers, people that will become the New People of God, the New Israel,

the sorts of people that the Twelve Apostles will be called to gather from all the nations of the world, surrounded by them, Jesus waves his hand around, and says,

"I want you to meet my family!"

All those who come to Jesus,

who surrender their lives to him and

order their thinking and behaviour according to His will and direction and call

all those Jesus calls

FAMILY.

And he, says Romans 8:17, is the Big Brother.

Over time the Big Brother would

pour him very life out for that family.

Jesus loves this rag-tag family.

He knows the name of everyone in it.

He empowers them.

He sends them.

Later, after he's gone to heaven, his Holy Spirit inspires St.Paul with another family-related image for the Church.

Know what it is?

It's found in Ephesians 5:21-33

Jesus calls the Church his **BRIDE.**

He adores her - and washes her.

Desires that she be **beautiful!**

That's powerful stuff.

And perhaps ought to give us pause before we start issuing pronouncements of one sort or another about this gathering.....

.....no matter how motley a crew it may seem to be.

Today, it seems fashionable to say, "*Ah, yes - I love the church that is written about in the New Testament..... but not the visible beast that dots the landscape today because.....*"

...and then comes the litany of complaints on blog after blog, and in book after book.

Sometimes they're specific.

And sometimes broad generalizations.

Sometimes they are painful and real - such as those of the battered spouse of a pastor, who fled the home with nothing more than the clothes on her back, while her husband remained surrounded by a supportive board and to this day still preaches.

Sometimes they're as hard to grasp as the fog that's been wafting through Ottawa streets in the early hours this past week.

Here's the deal - without trying to minimize faults, and without *in any way* excusing sometimes horrific abuses that require enormous housecleaning and stringent discipline and even the strong arm of the law,

And without pushing aside one speck of the need for us to be taking long, hard looks in the mirror on a regular basis

Without any of that I do want to challenge each of us to pause before we make such pronouncements, whether it be silently in our mind, openly in conversation, or very publicly on a blog or in an email.

When Paul speaks of the love of Christ for the Church, like that of a bridegroom for a bride, he's speaking of a very visible, incarnate, lumps-and-bumps kind of group. The New Testament Church was by no means perfect. It was a mess, quite frankly!

They were struggling with matters of organization - like how to take care of the poor; or how far do we have to go to be inclusive; which rules are non-negotiable and which ones are flexible. They had double-speaking leaders. There was incest tolerated in a local congregation. We've got all sorts of examples of partisan infighting.

There's no reality show on TV today that has one up on the New Testament Church!

And yet -

They are the ones Jesus calls family.

They are the ones he loves as a bridegroom loves his bride.

Are you surprised?

I hope you're not.

Because, you see - **they are us.**

They are just a gathered bunch of twisted, mixed-up, sin-stained individuals who happen to have been adopted into the Holy Family,

and who are forgiven works in project,

in the process of being renewed and restored by the Holy Spirit.

In fact, Jesus' family wouldn't be fulfilling its mandate if it were filled up with fixed-up people.

Because the call of Jesus that comes to the family, down from those first 12, is to get out there and spread the healing and the hope to busted up people in a broken-down society in a sin-damaged world which so desperately needs good news.

If you believe that Jesus gives **you** a second chance,
then you also need to believe that he gives a second chance
to the person **beside you** this morning.

When you throw a stone at the church, be careful.

You may be throwing stones at yourself!

And the grace that you may be withholding from that hobbling, far-from-pristine gathering of brothers and sisters is grace that you are withholding from yourself.

And when you feel like throwing in the towel and walking away, you are throwing in the towel on the family of Jesus.

And I wonder what he thinks of that.

Hey!

We keep working at repentance and renewal.

And sometimes we have to hit hard in calling sin what it is.

The bridegroom himself does that in the early chapters of Revelation.

Reiterates his love -- and then calls the church **away** from sin and **toward** lovely behaviour.

But he doesn't just give up on the Bride.

His commitment to her is stubborn.

Which stands as a lesson to us....

.....Whether we are part of this particular medium sized, middle of the road churches called Calvin....

or of a mega church like the Met

or a mini gathering like the house churches that dot the Glebe

or a contemporary church like the one gathering in the Silver City cinema.

I hate to contradict some of the new spiritual gurus on PBS.

But Jesus wasn't just into sippin' lattes and talking spirituality at Starbucks.

He was about gathering people and knitting together a world-wide family.

It simply doesn't cut it to say that you're more spiritual by praying alone in the woods.

His call is for each of us sinners to join with other broken sinners and learn how to get along as family. That's real spirituality.

Which will lead, sometimes, to difficult stuff.

Because, as someone said recently in the Washington Post, Christians are worse than you think.

However -

never forget -

our Savior is better than you think!

And so we can,

in addition to the bad stuff,

also open our eyes and see all sorts of good stuff.....

....stuff that somehow doesn't get talked about much in these blogs or on the news..

The stuff of visiting the elderly, bringing meals to new moms, supporting disaster relief, caring for the sick, serving the poor, helping the refugee, befriending the lonely, and striving for justice.

The stuff of gathering regularly as family and, for better or worse, helping people connect with the Big Brother, raising prayers to the Father, seeking the outpouring of the Spirit, and linking brothers and sisters in relationship.

And sometimes even doing those things relatively well.....

.....sometimes.

As one blog put it, "If you are into Jesus, don't rail on his bride. Jesus died for the church, so don't be bothered by you having to do a little dying to self for the Bride's sake.

If you keep in mind that everyone in [the Family] is a sinner (including yourself)

and that Jesus Christ is the point

and **not** you,

your dreams,

or **your** kids,

your church experience might not be as lame as you fear.

And perhaps when we accuse Jesus' bride of being intolerant, we should stop to wonder about our own intolerances - intolerant of tradition, intolerant of authority, intolerant of imperfection except, of course, my own....

The Church, because it is Christ's [Bride], will outlive American Idol, the NFL, and all of our grandkids. We won't last, but the [Bride] will.

So when it comes to church, be like Jesus:
love it, don't leave it.

[Kevin Deyoung and Ted Kluck on allsufficientgrace.wordpress.com]

And never mind that <IGNORE> button!