

***Christ To The World -
A New Community***

Mark 3:13-35

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Well, we've just finished off a wonderful week in the life of our family. As many of you know, on June 27 we were able to celebrate the wedding of our daughter. It was a terrific privilege to walk my daughter down the aisle. And a true blessing to welcome Steve into our home as a new son.

And - what added to the event was having our extended family with us. Relatives came from Edmonton, Thunderbay, St.John's and Gander, and from Southern Ontario. They laughed and prayed and ate and celebrated with us.

It was magnificent.

At one point we had close to 50 of 'em in our house for a BBQ.

Close quarters.

Lots of work.

But I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Surrounded by the noise and laughter and hugs I realized how blessed and rich we are! There is a deep treasure in the relationship, in the connections, in the bonds.

I want to acknowledge our family before you here this morning, and give thanks to God for every one of 'em.

But even while saying that I have to admit that they aren't the absolutely most important blessing in my life.

They are not the first priority.

They are not the absolute cornerstone and bedrock of my life.

And I hope that you can say the same about your family.

No, I am not trying to undermine Canadian society.

But just maybe I **am** trying to put a bit of tarnish on the myth that sometimes goes round telling people that the biological family is **THE** centrepiece of our society, and ought to be the hub of all that we plan for and do.

I say that because of something that Jesus once said.

Please join me in hearing him.

We'll listen to his words in a broader context.

The crucial exchange comes towards the end of our reading, verses 31-35.

And what we'll be told is that **there is a spiritual tie that is closer than any blood tie.**

MARK 3:13-35, p.37 (NT)

There is a spiritual tie that is closer than any blood tie.

There is a spiritual family that is more important than any biological family.

That is God's message into our lives this morning.

A message that we need to factor in when we set our priorities, plan our spending, figure out what we're going to do with our time, and even when we engage in leisure activities.

There is a spiritual family that is more important than any biological family.

This important message gets set up with the first words of today's reading, describing Jesus appointing the twelve.

Notice what he does.

He goes up on a mountain.

All of you readers of the Old Testament. does that remind you of something?

Shades of Sinai, and the founding of Israel, isn't it!

And deliberately so.

How many disciples does Jesus call?

Twelve.

One for each of the ancient 12 tribes of Israel.

Do you see what Jesus is doing?

He is founding a new nation, a new people of God, on the shoulders of the 12 men that he appointed.

And then he goes home.

Yes - there still is a space for home life inside Jesus.

Whatever else I say today, don't start a rumor that Jesus **denounces** family life.

Jesus himself goes home.

And as you flip through other bible passages you'll quickly see that Jesus **DOESN'T** blow off responsibilities to biological family, or the importance of **our** ties to our biological families.

Luke 2:51 - Jesus went to Nazareth, and lived in subjection to his earthly father and mother.

In Mark 7:10-13 Jesus tears a strip off those who had found a legal loophole that they though got them off the hook of caring for aging parents.

And in John 19:26-27, while hanging on the cross, Jesus makes sure that his mother, Mary, will be cared for in his absence, by designating his friend John to be a surrogate son.

Home, family and marriage, as we celebrated it with our daughter and son-in-law, is an ordinance blessed and sanctioned by the Creator Himself.

So we value it, protect it, and honour it.

So, Jesus heads home.
And encounters huge resistance.
On two fronts.

His biological family think that he's dropped off the deep end. He's been working too hard.
He's not taking care of himself. Not even eating!
Workaholic.
So, they get ready to do an intervention to shake him free from his fanaticism.

And then there are the religious big shots.
They fluff Jesus off.
They level the worst possible accusation possible - "Jesus is in cahoots with the devil."

Jesus responds in vigorous language.
He rejects **any** association with the family of Satan.
Jesus is founding a new community.
And it has **NO** association in **ANY** way with the realm of darkness.

Then the word comes that his family is waiting.
In Jesus' community, when your family called you came.

But Jesus **doesn't** come.
Not right away.
Not this time.

Because he's got an important point to make.
There is a value that is higher than any family value.
And that is the value of the Family of God.

He actually **demotes** his biological family in favor of the family of God.

Jesus' biological family wants to take him home to cool him down.
His devotion to God's call seems too radical.
His level of service seems over the top.
And Jesus says, "NO!"

There is NOTHING more important than following the call and will of God.
And if your family thinks your numb nutty, off your rocker, well - too bad!

If we have to choose between faith and family, Jesus calls us to choose faith.

If we have to choose between obedience in service or keeping the family happy,
Jesus calls us to obedience.

The crowd has huddled around Jesus to hear him.
And Jesus sees into their hearts, knowing that they are fully intentioned on going out and putting his words into practice.

He gestures towards them - "They are my brothers and sisters."

You, believers, are gathered here, huddled around the Word of God in Jesus Christ.
And in your hearts you are fully intentioned on going out and putting those words into practice.

Take heart this morning and know that Jesus gestures towards you and smiles.
He says to the angels who are standing around the throne in heaven -

"They are my brothers and sisters."

That's why you can turn to the person sitting beside you this morning and greet them at the conclusion of this service, when we offer a greeting of peace to each other, and say, "Peace be with you - **my brother... my sister.**" And do that knowing that it is not merely religious mumbo jumbo that you're blabbing.

It is deep, rich, sacred truth that you're speaking into their lives.

The truth that because of your common commitment to hearing the words of God as they come through the person of His Son, and then putting those words into practice -

- because of that

you

are

family.

With all the blessings and all the challenges that go with it.

Meaning that we make space for each other - for **all** the members of the family.

That's why it is SO good that there'll be camping for the Church **family** this summer.

That's why it is **right** for some people to give up sleeping at home in a couple of weeks to roam the halls here - because they'll be keeping things safe for other members of the **family** of faith in Jesus Christ during the SERVE mission. And while they do, biological family will have to wait.

That's why we make room for singles and married people, divorced and widowed, those with kids and those without -- we make room for them in every part of this church's governance and programming and life.

And that's why this church doesn't give top billing to the nuclear family with 1.8 kids, a dog, and a mini-van.

And that's why you're not more important here once you're married, or have kids.

Because - at the end of the day - those things aren't important markers in God's family.

And that's why we celebrate when people of all sorts of different national and cultural backgrounds enter these doors.

Because it **isn't** about a particular ethnic heritage.

It's about being huddled around Jesus, and then heading out to serve him.

Together.

As one family.

As a family then:

- well, we respect each other. Just because someone in this family thinks differently than I do on this issue or that, doesn't mean I can ignore them. Or speak demeaningly of them. They are, after all, the brother or sister of Jesus.

And if He values them - I had better, also!

- and when there's an issue, we don't run away. No more than you think of doing that from your biological family.

Running away isn't an option.

If you're a member of another congregation and visiting today, perhaps thinking about switching here or to another church, I want you to go home and think carefully about what you're doing and why. And ask seriously, don't you need to be headed back and sorting things out in that corner of the Family of God that is your home congregation?

We don't cut and run from family.

- and when trouble hits, we gather round and support the one in difficulty. Because family sticks together. Bringing over a meal. Taking them out for coffee. Having them in for lunch. Sending a card. In Jesus' name.

- and when you're having time to play or relax or party, perhaps looking round for brothers and sisters that are often overlooked. Perhaps they need an invitation to your next July 1st BBQ, or Civic holiday picnic or informal gathering in your backyard.

Because, after all, your home is open to all family members.....

.....isn't it???

It should be.

It's why Sharon and I felt it was important to host a reception after Alisa's wedding here in the Fellowship Hall, and invite you all to be there as our guests.

Because **you** are our family!

You matter to Jesus.

And you matter to us.

Earlier I told you that I give thanks for the wonderful time we had last weekend celebrating with relatives that came from across Canada for the wedding.

I want to say now that I give thanks for the wonder that Sharon and I can have by living week after week, and year after year with you all as members of the wonderful family in Jesus Christ here at Calvin Church.

I want to acknowledge your devotion to Jesus.
And Christ's wave of affirmation to you saying,
*"These are my brothers and sisters!
This is my family."*

Yes - you are **my** brothers and sisters and mothers.
In Jesus.
Thank God for each one of you!

I began by sharing how, at one point, we had close to 50 relatives in our house last weekend.

Close quarters.

Lots of work.

But I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Surrounded by the noise and laughter and hugs I realized how blessed and rich we are! There is a deep treasure in the relationship, in the connections, in the bonds.

Let me end by saying that in a few minutes we'll head to the fellowship hall.
And there'll be over 200 of us there.

Each one a brother or sister or mother in Christ.

And I hope that surrounded by the noise and laughter and hugs you will take a moment and appreciate just how blessed and rich we are!

And, before you head out the door, take a moment to breathe a prayer of thanks to God for the deep treasure that we share in the relationships, the connections, and the bonds here at Calvin Church.

And then work in the weeks and months and years to come to protect and nurture and celebrate those relationships and connections and bonds.

For Christ's sake.