

Date: June 10, 2018

Scripture: Mark 3:20-25

Title: FAMILY

There's a wonderful time-honored story about a country preacher who announced that on the following Sunday he would preach on the story of Noah and the Ark. He gave the scriptural reference for the congregation, to read ahead of time.

But, a couple of mischievous boys in the church noticed something interesting about the placement of the story of Noah in the Bible. So they slipped into the church and glued two pages of the large Bible, in the pulpit, together.

On the following Sunday the preacher got up to read his text. He was reading from the King James Version of the Bible. He began, "Noah took himself a wife, and she was . . ." He paused for a moment as he turned the page to continue . . . "she was . . . 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide and 30 cubits high."

He paused, scratched his head, turned the page back and read it silently, turned the page and read again, "she was . . . 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide and 30 cubits high." He still didn't realize that two pages of the Bible had been glued together. Finally he looked up at the congregation and said, "I've been reading this old Bible for nigh on to fifty years, but still there are some things that are hard to believe."

Well, I'm going to confess that there are times when I agree with that old preacher. There are some times you read things in the Bible that make you scratch your head. A good example is the narrative in Mark 3 concerning Jesus' uncertain relationship with his family. We read in verse 20: "Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat . . ." Now listen to this, and remember Mark is talking about Jesus: "When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" That's Jesus they're talking about, and these are his mother and brothers doing the talking.

If you were a writer of a Gospel trying to convince people that Jesus is the Messiah, why in the world would you include the notion that, at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus' own family had questions about his sanity?

Matthew and Luke, who incorporated much of the same material as Mark in their versions of these stories, have nothing to say about this alleged rift between Jesus and his family, although the writer of the Gospel of John confesses, "For even his own brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:5). Saying, they didn't believe in him, sounds a whole lot better than saying, "They thought he was out of his mind." Why would Mark include this story?

It was bad enough, as Jesus became more popular with the common folk, that the religious establishment was growing in its opposition to him. But, it's jarring to think that Jesus' own family was questioning whether he was out of his mind. So, why would

Mark include it? There are some possibilities that come to mind.

First, Mark mentions it because it really happened. There are many cynical people today, who think a lot of things in the Bible were made up, by the writers of the scripture. If so, these writers did a pretty poor job of it. If there was some kind of conspiracy on the part of early Christian historians to say things about Christ that were not so, don't you think they would have tried to reconcile their various stories? Even an event, as critical as the story of Christ's resurrection, is told from several different points of view.

The writers of the Old and New Testament were simple folk who simply reported what they had seen and what they had heard. They weren't trying to get the facts to fit their slant on things. They were reporting on facts, as they truly perceived them. Eyewitness accounts differ. Think of the blue dress or Gold dress or Yanny or Laurel. That's one thing you can always count on. If several people, describing the same scene, use exactly the same words to describe that scene, they're probably reading from a script or they're probably lying.

The first reason Mark tells us about Jesus' problems with his family, is that they really happened. After all, Jesus' teachings were hardly orthodox. If he simply taught what all the other rabbis were teaching, why would he bother to come into this world in the first place? Even those who loved him, thought his teachings were a little extreme.

We need to remember, that Jesus never got all starry-eyed, when he talked about family. Remember how he said to one man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Wow. That's was rude. Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9: 59-62). Later he puts it even more bluntly: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

There was another occasion when Jesus' mother and brothers came looking for him. "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:31-35).

Can you imagine that Jesus' family might have taken some of his teachings personally? How would you feel if you were in their place? All families have issues. There are no perfect families.

In fact, that may be the second reason Mark mentioned the problems Jesus had with his family, to emphasize that there are no perfect families. The Bible is very open and direct about the difficulties of families. Think of the stories that grace its pages, Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers. Think of the troubled

marriages, Abraham and Sarah, Hosea and Gomer, David and his many wives. It's very difficult to find an example of an ideal family in the pages of the Bible. That's one reason Christians made such an impact on the society of their time. In spite of some of Jesus' radical teachings, the early Christian community took marriage and family life very seriously. Obviously, that was because of their association with Jesus. They knew that Christ was not anti-family. He was simply pro-kingdom of God. He knew that if you sought God's kingdom first, everything else, including your family life, would fall in place.

The Romans were infamous for their lack of marital discipline. Someone put it, "The Romans shared **nothing** . . . but their wives. Christians shared **everything** . . . but their wives." The Christian community affirmed the dignity of women and even children, when many non-Christians cast their family members aside with little thought to their well-being. Thanks to Jesus, the early Christians were radically pro-family. God hurts when anyone or any family is hurting. There are no perfect families.

The third reason Mark may have mentioned the conflict between Jesus and his family, is to set the stage for what happened to his family in the aftermath of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

According to Mark 6:3 and Matthew 13: Jesus had four brothers: James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. He also had sisters, but we don't know their names or how many there were. Our Roman Catholic friends, believe these were Jesus' stepbrothers and stepsisters, children of Joseph by a prior marriage. We don't know, what the real source of their unhappiness with Jesus was. We do know, it's sometimes those closest to us, who have the greatest difficulty, seeing our worth. That may be so in your family.

I wonder if Mary and Joseph ever told Jesus' siblings the stories of Christmas, of the angel's visitation or the wise men or of the angels singing in the heavens. Perhaps they decided that it would only cause confusion in the minds of the other children, maybe even resentment, as in the story of Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. In any case, his siblings didn't immediately embrace the idea that Jesus was the Messiah, the one for whom Israel had been waiting for hundreds of years.

On the day Christ ascended to be with his Father, "the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James." Now listen to the next verse: "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, **and with his brothers.**" Something obviously had happened in this family, that made them change their minds about Jesus' teachings.

In fact, we learn later, that these same brothers became quite important in the history of the early church. According to tradition Jesus' brother James was the leader

of the church in Jerusalem and the author of the book of James. He's sometimes referred to as James the Righteous, to distinguish him from James the Apostle. His brother Jude is credited with writing the book, by the same name in the New Testament, though this is a matter of controversy.

But what a wonderful turn of events. The same family members who had earlier thought he was out of his mind, had become a part of the family of faith. Why? Because it all really did happen, Jesus' amazing but unorthodox ministry, the strife with his family, his crucifixion by the religious authorities, and most important his resurrection from the grave. It all really happened. The early Christian writers didn't try to get their stories straight. This was not fake news. Jesus, king of kings and Lord of Lords, is risen from the grave. If you doubt it's true, ask any member of Jesus' family. Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.