

SERMON

**The Servant, the Crowds and the Kingdom** (Mark 3:13-4:34)

They say that you can choose your friends but you cannot choose your family. Just before I was to get married I was told this one piece of advice amongst others. “Look to and at your mother-in-law.” I asked why should I do this? The answer I received was that if you look at your mother-in-law, that will be your wife in thirty years time. I decline to give the answer to my thoughts when I did that, but I still took the risk anyway! Although to say that I get on very well with my mother-in-law and her daughter, I am glad to say – even after thirty years!

You can choose your friends but you cannot choose your family, they say. But which family are we talking about? We heard firstly in our reading today that Jesus went about choosing certain close friends. He appointed twelve apostles, notice for a specific task of being sent out, but also that they **might be with him** (Mark 3:16). Notice that these twelve were called out of the crowd; we read that in verse 13

**“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.”** (Mark 3:13 NIV)

Jesus needed people around him, people he could trust, people in whom he would trust. Even the Son of God needed others. In our society today there are things that we are losing, some say we have lost.

Family – one of those things is family. We are now far more disparate as a nation, as a world population. At one time you grew up in a community, you met someone in your community and you then married someone in the same community. Or if you were really bold it might be someone in the next village or local town, but then you settled in your own community, or that of your spouse and then you brought up your own children in that community and the cycle repeated itself.

This is seen in the Wedding ceremony where there is the residency rule. You can get married in England and Wales as long as you have both lived in a registration district for at least seven days immediately before giving notice of marriage. Technically you have to have a room in the address you give to the registrar. It is where your suitcase is. They are thinking about changing that to make registering for a marriage over the internet, but it has not come into being yet.

Also the fact that banns are read out or posted so that the community can know if you have been married before is a sign that marriage, that a wedding is a community affair – the community or two communities where the bride and groom were brought up and lived.

Today that does not happen. We live in a society where people move long distances now and so families are all over the place. Let us do a mini-survey.

- Please stand if you live within ten miles of your parents or any of your grown up children.
- Keep standing if you live within two miles of your parents or any of your grown up children, if not please be seated.

Please be seated

- Please stand if you are in a different country to your parents or any of your grown up children.
- Keep standing if you are in a different continent to your parents or any of your grown up children.

We are a far more separate people now and so we do not have the support of families around us

Community – the other thing we have lost is a sense of community. When Sue and I move to Swavesey, there were people in the village who had been born there, had grown up there, had married another person from the village and had worked there all their lives. Some of them thought that they needed a passport to leave the village!

But today we live in one area, we work in another, with people who live nowhere near to us. We can then spend our leisure time in another area, and then church in yet another area. None of these areas overlap and so we do not really belong to any one community.

We are losing out because we are made, we are designed to be gregarious to be a social animal, to be with others. We need it for stimulation; we need it for our own psychological well-being. Some people need it more than others. I heard about one person who after a couple of days on their own, on day three comes down in the morning and has a conversation with the fridge and the microwave!

Jesus needed people and so he has these twelve around him, that he calls from the crowd who are following him. Notice what Jesus said at the end of the passage that we read, verse 34

**“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 3:34-35 NIV)

My family is here, he says. It is those who do the will of God. This group of twelve were to become the family of Jesus, because they did the will of God.

- Yes, we know that at times they failed. Jesus asks them on one occasion to pray while he went off and prayed in his own and they fell asleep. But this did not ruin the relationship between them.
- Yes, we know that at times they let Jesus down. Peter denied that he even knew Jesus when the going got tough, and Peter felt tremendously guilty because of it. But then we read that Jesus repaired that problem between them.
- Yes, we know that one name on that list of twelve, Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus, we are told that in verse 19, but he was still part of that group. One of my unanswered questions is why Judas was ever part of that group because he was uncaring, a thief and a traitor. But he was trusted and so because part of that ‘family’ around Jesus.

Just because these things can and do happen, being let down in small ways and in big ways, in being betrayed, it does not mean that we shut ourselves away in our boxes that we call houses, only emerging to get into our metal boxes called cars, and then when we meet other people to keep ourselves inside our own psychological box, thus keeping people away, not letting them near to us – because that makes us vulnerable, that makes us feel vulnerable.

Notice what happened when Jesus made himself vulnerable. He was accused of being either mad or bad. His blood family say he is mad, his enemies say he is bad! Verse 20

**“Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”** (Mark 3:20-22 NIV)

His biological family say that he is **out of his mind** (Mark 3:21). This is probably not to the fact that he missed a meal or two as it says in verse 20, or though that is the sort of thing that mums worry about. "Have you eaten today? What have you had today?...What, no breakfast! You must have breakfast, it is most important meal of the day. And it does not sound if you are getting your five a day – you must have your five portions of fruit and veg a day and five portions of baked beans do not count." It is probably not just this that leads to the charge that Jesus is out of his mind, but his whole behaviour generally and that he is taking on the religious authorities.

So the family is on the way to save Jesus from himself – to take control of Jesus, for his own sake of course.

And when they turn up outside the house, Jesus is told of their arrival and he says

**"...Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."** (Mark 3:34-35 NIV)

Jesus looks around the room and says those words. Notice that it is not everyone in that it is not everyone in the room who are family, but those who do the will of God. So what does this mean for us?

It means that when we become a Christian, when we do the will of God, that we enter a new family. We join the family of God with all the ups and downs that it entails. We have already heard about the twelve that Jesus took as family and the challenges that he faced with them. It means that we have to be counter-cultural. We cannot be isolationist in our lives and that our Christian family must be high up in our list of priorities. We read of the early church that

**"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."** (Acts 2:46-47 NIV)

We are part of the Christian family and there is a question that can be posed today. Which is more important to you, your biological family or your spiritual family? Which family would you put yourself out for, your blood family, or your Christian family? Whom did Jesus put first? What did the early church do?

One of the people who have spoken to me most on this is my uncle Bob. My uncle Bob had seven kids, five boys, then a girl and finally another boy. As you can imagine his council house was quite crowded when the family was young. It was always an adventure to go to his house because for me, an only child, there was always someone to play with who was near to my age. We did not go very often because we lived a fair way from them. It was also an adventure because we never knew who else was going to be there. At one time we meet Alfie who lived in Yarmouth, my uncle and his family lived in Barking. When petrol prices went up, Alfie did not mind because as he said, "I will not be affected because I only buy £10's worth of petrol at a times."

But on one occasion I remember arriving at the house and we were introduced to a family of four. During our visit it transpired that the family were staying with my uncle and aunt and however many children were at home at this time – quite a few as I recall. This family of four were having a hard time, my uncle and aunt, knew them, heard about the hard time and offered them a place in their already crowded home. What a wonderful Christian act, to open up their home to others, to practice hospitality. But my uncle and aunt are not and would not call themselves Christians.

I once put the scenario to a church about a family of four in their church who became homeless, thought no fault of their own – what would you do for them? The solution was to say offer a single person who was at the church a room in another house, while the family moved into the vacated house – the single person was not asked if that was OK for them! No-one really wanted to put themselves out for another family, even a brother and sister in Christ!

So the question still stands: which is more important to you, your biological family or your spiritual family? Which family would you put yourself out for, your blood family, or your Christian family?

The answer really requires us to be brutally honest with ourselves. If an appeal is put out about someone needing somewhere to stay, do you response or let it go in one ear and out the other? If someone is needing help, do we see if we can offer, or just never think about it?

Perhaps we have lost this idea of family because we are a disparate group of people now as we saw earlier and this individualism has come into church. We sit in the same place, like most people, so we know the few people around us, but as for others, I know them by sight, but not their name or anything about them. We have lost the notion of relationship with others at a deeper level than just smiling and saying hello. We have stopped making our vulnerable and being trusted enough for others to do that. We need to get to know each other better.

So now we are going to go on the move. I would like you all to get up in a moment, out of your seats and go to someone that you do not really know and ask that person two questions:

- What do you do most to relax?
- What is your favourite television programme?
- You may have to ask their name as well

When you have had a little conversation about that, move on to someone else and ask the same two questions. If some hobby or pastime has fascinated you that someone else has told you about, then you can return to them over coffee for a longer chat.

After a while Darren will begin to play the final song we are singing this morning and when he does, do not return to your place, but stay where you are and join in the song from where you have ended up and hopefully it is not right next door to where you have been all the way through the service. The first part of getting to know someone is to talk to them, so we need to talk. So remember the questions

- What do you do most to relax?
- What is your favourite television programme?
- You may have to ask their name as well

Off you go.

PEACE