

Sermon: Mark 3:20-35; Genesis 3:8-15
"Welcome to Your Forever Family"

Preached at Christ Church La Plata/Wayside
Pent 4, Year B, Sunday, June 16, 2024

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Who here grew up in a dysfunctional family?

Who lives in a dysfunctional family now?

Does it make us feel better to know that the very first family was dysfunctional?

That the very first man and first woman, nearly from the beginning of creation, were incapable of being honest with each other or with God?

That their sons took sibling rivalry to murderous lengths?

I once wrote a sermon drama called "Cain and Abel in Family Therapy," and when the scene was over, the therapist's assistant comes in to say that Mary and Martha are waiting for their session.

The bible is full of dysfunctional families.

Dysfunction comes from broken communication, and broken communication was the first consequence of the Woman's disobedience.

God said to eat the fruit of any tree in the whole Garden of Eden, except one.

It didn't take much tempting for her to become convinced that was the only one worth eating, and off she went, and then off the Man went.

And the consequences were immediate: first, they became self-conscious.

They knew they were naked, and it didn't feel right, where before it was natural.

Self-consciousness means we are split within ourselves – we watch ourselves.

Then they became split off from God – they tried to hide from God, and then lied.

There's a joke about a pastor who decided to pay a visit on a new family in his church. He went over, and rang the bell, but no answer.

There were cars in the driveway, so he knocked; still no answer. He went around back. No answer. Finally, he wrote "Revelation 3:20" on his calling card, stuck it in the door and left. Who here knows what Revelation 3:20 says?

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."

So the following Sunday after church, an ushers came up to the pastor and handed him a card. "Pastor, this was in the offering plate, addressed to you."

The pastor looked at it. It simply said, "Genesis 3:10."

"I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

A third consequence of rebellion was that they split from each other – blaming and shame begins right here. Sin begins right here. One creature points the finger at another – and finally, an animal gets blamed, and the consequence of his role as tempter is enmity between his descendants and that of the woman – and here is the break between humanity and the natural world, one that is deepened as the man and woman are expelled from the Garden and fitted with animal skins as clothing... so we have the first shedding of innocent blood to provide the covering. All that from eating a piece of fruit, breaking a stupid rule?

No, all that from turning away from the love, provision and authority of the Creator. The source of sin is the Tempter – personified as a serpent in our Garden story, named as Satan or Beelzebul in our Gospel story, who must be bound so that his victims can be freed. The consequence of sin is broken relationships – with God, with each other, with creation and within ourselves. Jesus came to heal that break, to make us whole again, to restore relationships, to bind the power of the enemy of human nature so that wholeness can happen.

In today's gospel story – do we see wholeness? Restored relationship? We see Jesus' dysfunctional family, fighting through clenched teeth in public. Jesus' mother and brothers travel to see him, to get him to stop making a spectacle of himself – and he refuses to see them. Then he goes further – he says to the crowd gathered around him listening to his teaching, "Who are my mother and my brothers? You are!" He has not cut off his family – he has expanded it.

In our culture, we are very family-focused. Not all cultures put such a premium on blood relationship. Many place the focus on the community.

That is closer to what Jesus taught and lived – he was creating a new community, marked by love and devotion to God, love so close and care so mutual, it was like the bonds of family.

This is the family into which we are adopted in baptism.

This is the family that we will be a part of for eternity. Our blood families are given us to love and nurture, tend for growth, but they are not eternal.

This family is forever, and Jesus invites us to put it first,

before ALL other priorities, including our blood families. And if they get in the way of our deepening our relationship with Jesus, we lovingly put him first.

When we don't put Jesus first, all his priorities slide down the list – giving, forgiving, justice, compassion. When we do put Jesus first, love expands. We don't have to love our families less – we just start to love other people as much or even more. We live in an expanded web of relationships that includes our love for our families.

I discovered this again two weeks ago enjoying a weekend with the Canadians who became part of our parish during the pandemic and continue to pray with us nightly and study scripture weekly.

Being with them was entirely natural – they are our family.

The movement of God is always growth, always growing in love.

We don't know how Mary and Jesus' brothers felt that day, returning home, not even having been granted an audience with him. Were they bitter? Angry? What we do know is that by the end of the story, they had joined Jesus' new family.

They had become followers too, not only of their Y'shua, but of the Christ.

Jesus was reconstituting family all the way to the Cross; even as he was dying, he gave his mother into the care of his beloved disciple John – now as real a brother to him as those with whom he shared DNA.

And at least one of his biological brothers, James, became the leader of the Jerusalem church, the *koinonia* fellowship of those who called Jesus Lord.

That's our family now. We get to call Jesus brother, too.

We get to call each other sisters, mothers, fathers, nephews, cousins.

We get to walk with each other, and with God, in the cool of the day and enjoy the deepest intimacy and support.

We learn how to communicate with God so we're open to God's Spirit.

We learn how to communicate clearly and openly with each other, so wounds don't fester.

We learn to embrace this world and its creatures as part of our family, thanking plants and animals for giving of themselves to feed us.

We become integrated and whole within ourselves,

knowing how precious we are to God and to God's whole family.

AND we get to help this family expand, ever inviting those who are lost or lonely, frayed or afraid, into this fellowship of love.

We are in the business of adoption, my friends – who would you like to call sister, brother, cousin? Invite her. Invite him. Invite them.

We are putting the fun into dysfunctional. **Amen.**

Genesis 3:8-15

The man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate."

Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

Mark 3:20-35

The crowd came together again, so that Jesus and his disciples could not even eat.

When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons."

And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.

And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" – for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him,

"Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you."

And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"

And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."