

Mark 3:20-35

[Jesus went home;] ²⁰and the crowd came together again, so that [Jesus and the disciples] could not even eat. ²¹When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” ²²And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” ²³And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷But 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.

²⁸“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”—³⁰for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

³¹Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” ³³And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
– Amen.

I feel like I should begin by fully disclosing to all of you that I have found this sermon to be a particularly difficult one to write. Not because the text was terribly tricky or hard to interpret. It's actually pretty apropos. I found it difficult to write because I knew it would be my last preached here at Grace as your Vicar, and something about starting it seemed to bring that anticipated finality into reality. So, I kept putting it off all week in spite of having a pretty good idea of the direction it would go. (A preacher never officially knows what is going to happen until they sit down and start writing, and sometimes until they begin speaking, because often the Holy Spirit has differing ideas from our own.)

I have had no problem coming up with ways to procrastinate. Helping wrap up final items with Cindy here in the office. Packing. Packing. More packing. Finalizing housing in Texas. Getting my kids ready to go visit their father in Florida for the summer. Laundry. Laundry. More laundry. Washing dishes. Cleaning so the packing zone makes me look a little less like hoarder than I do right now (I've reached that stage of moving). Reading books. And finally – watching TV.

My show of choice this week? M*A*S*H. Not the show I bet many of you were expecting! You see - as I've spent time dwelling in and reflecting on this text, I kept coming back to the concept of family. And it made me reminisce and get nostalgic for my family and some of our traditions growing up.

When I was younger, my family didn't often sit and eat dinner around a table together. We were a TV Tray family and we often ate in the living room on the fold out portable TV Trays while watching shows. The pattern was the same – several episodes of syndicated M*A*S*H, followed by an hour and a half of news (which as a kid was THE WORST), and then Jeopardy.

I spoke to you previously about my love for the show Gilmore Girls – well M*A*S*H is right up there on my favorite list as well. Although the final episode of M*A*S*H aired when I was 3 years old, it doesn't matter. The show is timeless. It was, and continues to be, one of my favorite television shows. If for some unspeakable reason you have never watched it (which is hard to imagine given how often it is syndicated) – I have one word for you – YouTube. All the episodes are there!

This week I watched some of the earlier episodes and then skipped to the finale. Usually TV Show finales are the WORST! They do a terrible job of wrapping up plot lines and ending in places that feel complete to viewers who

invest a lot of time and emotional energy in fictitious characters. In my humble opinion – M*A*S*H is the exception to this standard. *Goodbye, Farewell, and Amen* is an amazing episode and an amazing finale.

The story of these characters who all come together in war time was brought to a beautiful conclusion that really emphasized how this group of mismatched, hodgepodge, rando's from all different places and walks of life could come together and become family. For some of them – this form of family had become more real to them than their families back home.

In our Gospel this morning Jesus speaks to the concept of family as well. We are told that Jesus went home – so I'd assume that means Nazareth. In Mark's gospel Jesus isn't exactly welcomed with open arms by all back in Nazareth. He begins teaching and a crowd gathers. It is so chaotic that Jesus and his disciples don't even have time to eat!

His family gets wind of the ruckus and come to restrain him. Apparently, Jesus has turned into that weird eccentric embarrassing cousin at the family reunion who is carrying on and making people uncomfortable. Kind of like Maxwell Klinger in the early M*A*S*H years.

Some scribes travelled from Jerusalem – apparently the religious authority sent along a spy party to keep tabs on Jesus after last week when he offended them so greatly that they conspired with the Herodians to kill him.

The scribes begin to claim that Jesus is the Devil, calling him Beelzebul and Ruler of Demons. They claim that this is who he is because he can cast out demons. Jesus rather eloquently points out how absurd this is. That would be undermining his own authority!

Meda Stamper wrote that: “Jesus makes clear the scope of what he is doing in his freeing of the demon-possessed. Jesus is coming to plunder Satan’s household and bring about his end, not by division from within but by stealth and force from without.”

At this point his family once again tries to interject because now not only is he being embarrassing, he’s also ticking off some rather powerful authority figures. Jesus ignores their summons, so the crowd intercedes and tells him that his family is outside asking for him. To this Jesus replies: “Who are my mother and brothers?” then looking at those around him he goes on: “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” Jesus claims those in his presence as his family.

Jesus knows that the life he is inviting these people into is not an easy life. It's also not always a welcoming life. Families will disown members because they choose to follow The Way. People will leave homes and all the safety and security that they may have built in life. They will travel to distant unknown places proclaiming the Good News to strangers. They will no longer have the luxury of family support. So, he makes sure they understand that they are his family. He is their family. They are each other's family. And this family will grow to feel more real than their biological family back home.

Just like those characters in M*A*S*H formed an unexpected and nonsensical kind of family, so too, were Jesus and his followers. And so too, do we today.

We live in a very transient world and more specifically in a very transient community full of people who are very far from "home" and very far from "family." Many of our members are those people. I am one of those people. I came to you because I followed Jesus' calling in my life. A calling that led me far from my home state of Oregon. That contributed to the demise of my marriage and left me alone and frightened and sad. And then that call led me here, to Grace.

At a point where I was very close to abandoning that call and heading back west to my home and my family, you all entered my life. And just like Jesus promised – I suddenly had family again. I had brothers and sisters. I had parental

figures. My children had surrogate grandparents. I had a whole mob of prayer warrior Auntie's who have informed me that they are joyfully claiming responsibility for my upcoming new marriage, because they all prayed for it to happen. I had a band of the strong, coffee drinking, silent type of Uncle's who showed love and affection far more subtly than the Auntie's. Every child in this church became a niece or nephew. Those who do the will of God in this place became my brother and sister and mother.

And you will never know how grateful I am for this Grace family. I have been told by many Grace members that Grace needed me. But honestly, Grace was doing pretty good before I came and will continue to thrive long after I leave. I needed Grace far more than Grace needed me.

Jesus knew that. Jesus knew that we would hit points in life where we were at our limit and about to throw in the towel. Admit defeat. Tuck our tails between our legs and slink back home. Concede victory to darker forces, because life is just too hard to do alone. And so, Jesus told us to look to one another and to create our own families.

So, my beloved Grace family – continue to be family for one another. Trust in Jesus and his invitation to join him on this journey. Rejoice in the fact that you get to participate in the unfolding of the good news of God's kingdom in this world.

And know that you are never, ever alone. Because you have one another. You are family.

I will never, ever forget this place or the family of mismatched, hodgepodge, rando's that I found here. I am grateful to you all. I love you all. I will miss you all tremendously. Goodbye. Farewell. and Amen.