

“All In the Family”

Our families are important to us. We do many things as families. We live together; we travel together; we have events during the year. We go to activities for our children at school. We come to church together. We learn to function as a unit. We take care of each other.

Today’s families have the characteristics that families have had for centuries. Family members look after each other. Family members put up with a lot from each other. There also may be a “crazy uncle” in the family.

For any family to function, each person must know their role in the family. They must ultimately work together. This does not mean there will not be problems or conflict in the family. The key is how they deal with the conflict.

Families need to work together, especially when someone in the family has a problem. If those in the family are divided over what to do, then it is less likely that the problem will be solved.

“All In the Family” was a breakthrough situation comedy television show in the early 1970’s. It dealt with changes in American culture and society which were occurring at that time. Archie Bunker, the main character, was set in his ways and was not happy with progressive new ideas and changes in the neighborhood. He

often had conflict with neighbors who were not from a white Anglo-Saxon background, the most notable George Jefferson, an African-American who became successful in the dry-cleaning business. Archie's wife Edith was the mediating factor in the family and usually brought Archie around to understand that we need to interact with all people, regardless of their background or beliefs. This included Archie's son-in-law, who Archie called "Meathead."

In today's passage from Mark 3:20-35, Jesus has a conflict with his family. Even Jesus was not immune from having to work things out with his mother and other relatives. Jesus' presence in the world had brought change and conflict. Jesus has been accused of being possessed by demons because he was casting out demons. These were very serious accusations. Such a person could be banished or executed. There were also rumors among the people that Jesus had gone out of his mind. Jesus' relatives apparently believed these rumors because they had come to take him by force. They were there to protect him because that is what family members do for each other. They care for each other.

In our passage today, Mark uses a literary technique called the sandwich. One story is told within another story. Jesus' dealing with his family begins and ends the passage. In between, like meat contained within two slices of bread, is the story of how Jesus deals with the accusation that he is possessed by the devil.

Jesus makes a convincing argument to the scribes that to attribute his power to Satan makes no sense. If he were in league with Satan, why would he cast out demons? A house divided against itself cannot stand. Jesus proves his actions are those of the Holy Spirit, not Satan.

To understand the context of this passage, one has to understand that the crowds around Jesus were so large that Jesus and his disciples had blockaded themselves in a house for their protection. Jesus had let the scribes in to talk to them. He and his disciples and others of Jesus' followers who were of the inner circle were in the house. The fact that Jesus' mother and brothers must call to Jesus from the outside indicates that the members of his family were not disciples.

That Jesus' family is on the outside teaches us the first lesson from this passage. Following Jesus may involve leaving family and occupation to do God's will. Jesus' first disciples, the fishermen, had left their families and occupation to follow him. Jesus provides an example for Markan Christians who have detached themselves from their original families. The Christians at the time Mark was written in 70 A.D. faced persecution and possibly death because of their faith. They had to realize that although their biological family was important, their Christian family was even more important.

Many of you, fortunately, have not had to leave your families because of your faith in Jesus. What you have to appreciate, though, is that your faith moves you into a new family as defined by Jesus in this passage. Jesus had already moved away from his natural family by returning to Peter's house in Capernaum as the place to which Jesus comes home after preaching in surrounding regions. Jesus redefines family to include whoever does the will of God. His family is not limited to his biological family. Anyone who follows him and does the will of God is a brother, a sister, and a mother to him.

Our church family, those whom we call our brothers and sisters in Christ, is even more important than our biological family. Jesus teaches us that familial authority cannot be set above doing the will of God. We may find it hard to put God's authority over family, but Jesus provides us with an example,

Another important lesson we glean from this passage is the role of women in the family of Jesus. Jesus refers to his sisters who do the will of God as well as his brothers. The presence of women in Jesus' description of the new family of the disciples distinguishes his followers from those who surrounded popular teachers of the law in Jesus' day. Other leaders of the day were male leaders engaged in public testimony, preaching and exorcisms who had only male followers. The

household setting of the early Christian community also facilitated participation by women. Women, as well as men, were part of Jesus' inner circle.

Family is important and was to Jesus as well. What we learn today, though, is that our family is not limited to our biological family. We have a bond and a wisdom which comes from those in our Christian family. Jesus was not among the powerful of society. He did not have the status of the scribes. He drew on the proverbial wisdom and religious instincts of those ordinary persons, both men and women, around him. We are a society dominated by so-called experts, and we seem to want to rely on these experts when we constantly make decisions about what authorities to trust. What Jesus tells us is that sometimes wisdom lies in everyday common sense from learning from our brothers and sisters in Christ. We don't want to be stuck in our old ways like Archie Bunker but need to continue to learn new things and meet new people. This is how God leads us through the Holy Spirit.