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Pentecost Proper 5B
Peace, Seattle
June 10, 2012
Mark 3:20-35

FAMILY VALUES

When I visit people in their homes for the first time, I'm always interested in seeing their family photos because of the memories and relationships they evoke. It's a great way to learn about who they are and the journey they've made through the years.

The portraits of my family of origin have become more important to me as the years have rolled on. They connect me to my roots as a visible reminder that I'm part of something greater than myself. And they chart the history of our family's growth from 2 to 10 to 39.

One of my favorite family portraits was taken by my great uncle Kelly when I was 13 years old. We were in southern California, mid-way on our three week, 5,000-mile family odyssey through 15 Western States in an old converted school bus—(yeah, that one.)

I like that photo not so much because of what it says but what it doesn't say. We're all wearing smiles in that photo, except the baby, but underneath our smiles, behind our eyes, is the richly mixed, up and down story of all the toil, the tears, the arguments, the adventures, and the close calls that accompanied us, shaping our experience on that journey.

When we take a close look at the family stories in the Bible—and we'll be getting an ample dose of David's story this summer, beginning with today's backstory on kingship—**we quickly see how painfully honest and uncensored the Biblical Family Portrait is.** Instead of covering up the faults, the questionable incidents, the betrayals and compromises of our ancestors in the faith, the Biblical accounts lay out the dirty laundry for all to see.

Beginning with the story of Adam and Eve and continuing through the story of Abraham and Sarah and their offspring in the covenant, Moses and the wilderness years, and then the story of Samuel and Saul, David and Solomon, the Scriptures tell us the unvarnished truth about human stumbling and about God's relentless pursuit of a covenant relationship with us.

Some years ago, as I was traveling along highway 101 testing out the new windshield I'd just installed on my motorcycle, when a log truck heading the other director kicked up a rock that ricocheted across the road right at me.

I could see it coming, but there was nothing I could do to avoid it. Sure enough…ZING! It smacked into the upper left corner of my shield and instantly a series of cracks formed, fanning out from the central point of impact. In only three days my new windshield had become compromised.

As we'll see in the weeks ahead, the accounts of King David's rise and fall is not unlike that broken windshield, with cracks and consequences fanning out in all directions.

Truth be told, this journey of life we all share as human beings is full of surprises, disappointments, triumphs, kicked up rocks, and royal blunders…

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So much so, that it's been suggested that when God created Adam on the sixth day, right then and there God should have demanded a damage deposit.[1]

Remarkably, the Bible does not leave us with idealized portraits of the human family but instead gives us true-to-life, down-to-earth portraits that remind us of our own lives, and of the shattered state of affairs in which we often enough find ourselves.

It's within this crucible of family life that a family's values emerge, and that's why I find our reading from Mark to be one of the most intriguing in all the gospels. For here we get to peek over the fence and see not only how Jesus defines family values, but how he redefines the family itself.

Three chapters into Mark's gospel and Jesus has already acquired enemies.

His ability to repair shattered lives gave him a quick following. But it was a following among the wrong kind of people. The outcast, the physically broken and disabled, the spiritually impure. Mark tells us that in response to Jesus acts of healing the clamoring for his attention was so insistent that he couldn't even sit down to dinner without being interrupted.

But in spite of the renewal that many were experiencing, some in his hometown were convinced Jesus had gone off the deep end, including, it seems, members of his own family.

Whatever their motive—whether it was out of compassion or out of need to protect the family name—they decide it's time for an intervention to stop their brother from destroying himself. So they show up as one, ready to demand that he give up his mission, only to find out that government lawyers have already beat them to the punch.

We all come from families and all families have certain fundamental rules, and if those rules are broken, we know there'll be heck to pay.

Just what had Jesus done, what rules was he breaking, that convinced his family he was off balance?

Driving out evil spirits, healing the sick, touching lepers, inviting a tax collector to be part of his inner circle…

Jesus was taking on the authority to usher in God's new age in which sin, brokenness and separation are healed, insiders are thrown out and outsiders are brought in. In doing so, he was shattering all the accepted and acceptable arrangements that his family, tribe and nation had developed and supported over two millennia. Guess whose coming to dinner.

As far as the family was concerned, this was the behavior of a mad man and they'd have come to take him home. And the scribes second that motion—taking it a step further—"HE IS POSSESSED BY A DEMON."

[1] Jim Hightower.

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When you start breaking the rules that a family or tribe or congregation live by, expect to encounter opposition.

With his family waiting outside, Jesus continues his work and you can feel the tension growing in the crowd around him as they exclaim, YOUR MOTHER AND FAMILY ARE ASKING FOR YOU.

What Jesus does next is incredibly powerful and completely unnerving.
With one word, Jesus shatters old family and tribal structures, and rebuilds them from scratch.

> WHO ARE MY MOTHER AND MY BROTHERS? He asks. And looking at those gathered around him, he says, HERE ARE MY MOTHER AND MY BROTHERS.
> WHOEVER DOES THE WILL OF GOD IS MY BROTHER AND SISTER AND MOTHER.

Jesus cannot—he will not—be party to a system that is blind to its own disease and insists on projecting that sickness on to others. Like a physician setting a broken bone that has begun to heal crookedly, Jesus **breaks** the old family and religious structure so that it can be re-set as something whole and holy.

In redefining family, he calls for a total reorientation to the core values of God's reign—grace, compassion, forgiveness, inclusion.

The barriers that formerly produced insiders and outsiders have been breached. The kingdom of God, it turns out, is a KIN-DOM—a family of a new order, formed not by blood or class or ethnicity or any other orientation, but by a common commitment to doing the will of God.

You and I are part of that KIN-DOM. When Jesus meets us at font and table, we find ourselves affirmed and equipped to be what we truly are—children of God, and sisters and brothers to one another.

The gospel power that transforms the world is the power to heal and forgive; to pluck up and to plant. It is the power to stretch out the stakes of our tent; to push out the boundaries of our community so those who are outside will be welcomed in.

Amen.