**Mark 3:20-35 June 6, 2021**

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

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Mark the 3rd chapter here re-reading these words. “Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying “He is out of his mind”. This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

My wife and I recently have been blessed to watch through the television show, “Little House on the Prairie.” The story of the Ingalls family is a famous one, the show was the adaptation of the books of Laura Ingalls Wilder and from my understanding the show was quite popular when it was on in the 70s and into the early 80s. If you could summarize the lives of the Ingalls and what’s important to them it would really fall into 3 categories. “Farming, Faith, and Family.” It was Charles Ingalls dream to travel out to Kansas and have his own farm. The Ingalls prioritize faith even when they were living alone out on the prairie and there was no church nearby. But the biggest takeaway from the show is the bond that this family shares, how they all work together to pay off a debt, how they all come together at the loss of a child, how they help each other despite the problems they face. It was that bond of family that was the foundation of this show and was a mirror into the lives of those who watched it about their own families and how they got along.

If the Ingalls family is the definition of a “normal” family, then my question for you this morning is, Would you say that you are part of a “normal” family? Think about that for just a moment. Would you call your family, normal? Or better yet let’s break that down even more, and just ask, what exactly is a “normal” family? I have to admit that as I watch the Ingalls family blissfully working together in perfect harmony sometimes I have to roll my eyes at how everything seems to fit so perfectly. Is that sort of perfection attainable? Is that really a “normal” family? Where do we get our picture of a family? Our experiences with our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and so on are probably where we get the best picture of what a family is, or more specifically what your family is by what you have seen and experienced throughout the years of your life, but where do you get the picture of a “normal” family? Is it in paintings? Books? Music? Is television the best place to go to find a normal family? Television families have defined generations. In this day and age you may get an idea of what a family is from a show like “Modern Family” or “This is Us.” But for my generation it was more the picture of “Family Matters” with Steve Urkel, or Full House. And we can even go back farther to other generations with families certainly like the Ingalls family, but also the Cunninghams on Happy Days, the Jeffersons, the Waltons, even the Bunkers on All in the family. Were those families normal? Is yours? Is the Bible the best place to find the “normal” family? Where even from the beginning we see the relationship between Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, the dysfunction of Noah’s family post flood, Joseph and his brother’s betrayal, David’s wives and sons, and that isn’t even scratching the surface. It’s hard to say that those families were “normal”, and even when we look at our Gospel lesson for this morning from the Gospel of Mark where we get to see a picture into the life of Mary, Joseph, Jesus and his brothers do they have a family unit that we would call….normal?

From what we read the answer is a resounding no. And while families do tend to joke around with each other from time to time and throw barbs back and forth, here in Mark we see a different kind of accusation. When the family of Mary and Joseph were asked about Jesus their answer was “He is out of his mind.” Is this normal behavior for a family? Well it does seem from time to time that a family can have a black sheep, a member that doesn’t necessarily fit in with the rest and who is different, but this is talking about a family dynamic that is anything but healthy or “normal”. They wanted to seize Jesus, meaning to stop him from what he was doing. In a sense what they wanted to do was end this whole “ministry” thing and bring him back to do the work of his earthly Father rather than His Heavenly Father.

We know from the text that this is the case because the words are right in front of us. And we also know just from doing a little digging into the Gospel of Mark that Jesus name was spreading. That already he had performed miraculous healing, that he had called men into service during his ministry, that he had called out demons, and that the crowds were so large that they wouldn’t even give Jesus or his disciples time to sit down and eat. That’s the enthusiasm that Jesus faced, to hear His word of prophecy and teaching of a new Kingdom. And it wasn’t just being noticed by the crowds who were curious, it was affecting his family, and it was drawing enemies. His family discredited him by saying that he was out of his mind. His enemies, the scribes discredited the works that he was doing by saying that he was an agent of Satan, and that through the power of the prince of demons he was casting out demons.

We know of Jesus enemies, and that eventually the accusations went from madness, to trouble maker, to serious problem, to a charge of blasphemy which ultimately led to a conviction of crucifixion. That’s what the enemies of Christ worked to accomplish, and if there was ever going to be someone that he could count on to help and support him, we may be tempted into thinking it would be his earthly family. But as we see, that’s not the case. Why is that? We have a few things to go off of. Jesus was after all the first born, and there would be special responsibilities for him to carry out in terms of keeping the torch burning for the business that his earthly Father Joseph was doing. Also as first born he would have responsibilities for the education and care of his siblings as well as the care of his mother. For him to run off and delegate or put these responsibilities to the side would be an issue that would cause divisions in the family. Families have expectations of how different members should act and what they should do, and Jesus’ family was no different. But we have to keep in mind that ultimately Jesus was unlike anyone else in his family and that their actions show that there was a misunderstanding of Christ’s ultimate work on Earth. Which wasn’t to have the most successful carpentry business in Nazareth, but which was to lead to a cross where he would die for the sins of the entire world.

All of these are potential reasons, but the answer in a sense lies in a more obvious place. It’s a harsh reality of this world, and one that we may not always like to face in our own lives. We ranked the priorities of the Ingalls family at the beginning of the message today, and let’s think about that further for just a moment. Which was most important in their lives? Farming? Certainly not. While it was their livelihood the Ingalls family would prioritize the needs of their children over the work that had to be done in the fields. So that’s where the true question lies. Which was more important? Faith or Family? We are faced with the same question in our own lives. We live in a society where family is at times the only thing that makes life worth living and that nothing is more important than family. But the truth is, we are members of two families. A sinful and fallen family that we were born into from our earthly mothers. And a perfect heavenly family that we were born into through the waters of Holy Baptism. We are members of both.

And Satan will use anything to distract us from our true joy in this world which is being members of this holy family of God who is all of our Fathers. He will use our ego, our selfish nature, and an inclination to sin to accomplish this goal which will lead to us neglecting repentance and forgiveness and instead seeking only our own happiness. But he also will use any idol to put in the place of Jesus Christ and the true worship of the Lamb of God. While these idols are usually described as the vices and addictions of this life that seem to entrap and entice so many away from their faith, things like money, power, fame, drugs, alcohol and many others, Satan also can use our earthly families. Remember the words of the First Commandment. “You shall have no other gods.” What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above ALL things.

Which includes ourselves, and also our families. This is a hard lesson for us Christians to learn, but it is important for us that we don’t misunderstand the role of our earthly families in our lives in comparison to our identity as Christians and children of our Heavenly Father. Because the temptation of putting family before God can lead to disastrous ends. It can lead to a rejection of Christ because of something that may have happened to a member of a family in the form of a crisis or disaster that will spread a feeling among the family that God doesn’t care or love them anymore. It can lead to families poisoning each other’s faiths by purposely leading away from the Church in the name of family unity. It can lead to seeing faith as just a family tradition rather than a personal relationship that God himself creates in the heart of His adopted children.

In earthly families, as we see from personal experience and God’s holy Word, it isn’t so perfect like we see out on the prairie and in the examples we have from sitcoms, books, and happy songs. At times there is pain, and sorrow, and dysfunction where members sin against each other. But our identity as God’s children in His heavenly family is something that brings comfort, joy, and peace to us here on Earth. For while Jesus himself loved his father, mother, and brothers, as we see from his words from the cross speaking peace to his mother while he hangs and dies, on this day, recorded in Mark 3, when they come to take him away from his mission which was to call sinners to himself and to teach them about salvation and the forgiveness of sins, he asks a very simple question. While his family waits for him to come to them, he asks those who are already gathered around him, “Who are his mother and brothers?” And the answer he gives is one of joy and peace to all of us as we are gathered here today to hear him speak and teach us in His Word. “Here are my mother and brothers.” In short, we gathered here today, are God’s family.

Members of God’s holy family by an adoption that we did nothing to earn or gain for ourselves but one that was given by the work of the Holy Spirit in the waters of Holy Baptism. Members of God’s holy family that gather together for a meal of forgiveness and life everlasting in Jesus’ body and blood given for the forgiveness of all your sins. And the joy and peace that comes from a proper understanding of your place in God’s holy family, is that whatever happens to you in this life, you are cared for, you are loved, and your needs are provided through Your Heavenly Father who sent His Son to die for you so that you will be where He is someday. So that in this life, when our earthly family shifts and changes, we have joy and peace in the knowledge that we remain children of God, and brothers and sisters in Christ. So that if our Father or Mother is taken from us, that we still have a Father who loves us and provides for us, and a Mother; the bride of Christ, the Church itself, which cares for us in God’s Word and Sacrament. That if we lose a brother, a sister, a child, or any other family member, that we still have all around us, people who love us, care for us, and reach out to us in the same love, care, and confession of faith of all the rest of God’s Holy Family.

That’s the joy of family, of a family that the world may not see as “normal” or even begin to understand. So take that joy, take it with you as you reach out to the lost and those who are dwelling in sin and despair. Take that joy with you as you remain in your earthly families growing in faith and joy. And finally remember now and always the love of your Heavenly Father, who has not forsaken you or left you at any point in your life, but who has adopted you into His family, through the work of His Son, your brother, Savior, redeemer, and friend. Who loved you enough to die and rise from the dead, not for himself, but for you.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.