

## **Homily for Pentecost 2, 2021**

Mark 3:20-35

*'Resistance to Christ'*

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### **TEXT - Mark 3:20-35**

*Then he went home; <sup>20</sup>and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. <sup>21</sup>When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.'*

*<sup>22</sup>And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' <sup>23</sup>And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup>If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup>And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup>And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. <sup>27</sup>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.*

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

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

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the Gospels, we read about quite a bit of **resistance** to Christ.

But the ways in which people resist him and challenge him, and even attack him,  
Are not all the same.

The opposition comes in all shapes and sizes.

And one of the very interesting things about our text today,

Is that Jesus says that these different ways of resisting him,  
are not all equal,

Some are worse than others,  
More spiritually seriousness.

Jesus says,

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

We'll get back to this in more detail later,  
But it's fairly clear Jesus is distinguishing between **bad** responses to God,  
And **worse** ones.

And there's a parallel here,  
with how people are resistant to the message of Christ and his Church today.

They take their stands for different reasons,  
In different forms,  
With different results.

Jesus helps us be **aware** of these today.

So,  
Let's look today at three different groups in this text which represent different attitudes to Christ.

His family,  
The religious leaders,  
And his disciples.

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### JESUS' FAMILY – ATTACK ON REASON

So first there is Jesus' **family**,  
That is,  
His biological family,

Specifically, we're told his mother and his brothers.

How do they approach Jesus?

Well, we read first,  
“...they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind.’”

Later on, we read:  
*‘Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him.’*

So there's a few things going on here.

First there's a claim on Jesus as their blood relative.

We all know how powerful the family bond can be,

And when someone within the family goes out and does something different and breaks the mould,

The influence of the wider family to reign them back in can be very powerful.

Some of **you** know this especially in connection with your Christian faith.

It can be very tough when you're the only Christian in your wider family,

and maybe they think **you're** a bit crazy for placing God, faith, prayer, worship, the Bible, at the centre of your life.

Well,

You're in good company!

Jesus himself experienced something of this.

But what do we make of this particular accusation that Jesus '*has gone out of his mind*'?

People,

Perhaps his family too,

When they heard Jesus teaching and the claims he made about himself,

When they saw the crowds flocking to him for healing,

They thought that Jesus had really lost it,

That He was out of control and not thinking straight.

One way to think about this attitude to Christ,

Is as a challenge to the **reasonableness** of the Christian faith.

Still to this day one of the big challenges people do have in their **own** Christian faith or their **explorations** of the Christian faith,

Is the challenge of *reason*,

Whether the Christian faith 'makes sense'.

We all know family and friends who say they just can't reconcile the claims of the Bible with how they think about the world otherwise.

It could be to do with science and the origins of life,

Or the perceived lack of evidence for God,

Alleged inconsistencies in the Bible,

In all sorts of ways people have challenges which are to do with reason,

Maybe this is the case for some of you here today?

The Church has a very important role here,

To engage with people at this level.

Notice in our text that when the next group comes with their accusation,  
Jesus uses a very logical, reasonable argument in response,  
Showing for certain he's not out of his mind.

There are immense resources in the Christian tradition for thinking through all the questions people have,

we don't need to be afraid of questions,  
We need to take them seriously and offer thoughtful responses.

This is certainly an emphasis both for Pastor Fraser and me in our work in confirmation classes,  
University ministry,  
Enquirer's classes,

These sorts of things.

Now, another side to this though,  
Is that there **can** be a spiritual pride that goes along with this sort of response to Jesus which is not healthy.

You hear this in Jesus' family as they stand outside the house where he is,  
Calling him to come out to them.

And it's true that as people use their reason to engage with the claims of Christianity,

It can be done in humility,  
But it can also be done in such a way that you position yourself over Jesus,

Thinking that the only way this could all make sense is if it conforms exactly to how I see the world.

There is a caution here against that pride.

We could say,  
If you're outside the household of Christ, so to speak,  
wondering about Christ and Christianity,

You need to know that coming into the house does not mean checking your brain at the door,  
Christianity is a coherent way of seeing the world,

But it's also true,  
that you do need to come into the house, so to speak,  
  
We do finally need to be willing to listen to Jesus and his Word,  
to submit our reason to his authority,  
  
to trust him.

This is the first group,  
His family and the resistance via reason.

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#### **SCRIBES - ATTACK ON THE SPIRIT**

But next,  
Things are taken up a notch.

Next we have a group who resists Jesus in such a way that is much more serious,  
The Scribes who come down from Jerusalem and say:

*'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.'*

What are these guys saying?

Well,  
If you can't discredit what someone is saying,  
What do you do?

You attack **them**,  
You play the man rather than the ball.

And if you can't dismiss the obvious power at work in Jesus' ministry,  
What do you do?

You question **where** he's getting that power from.

And so the religious leaders don't deny Jesus is doing miracles,  
Healing people and casting out demons,

But they say he's doing it as Beelzebul,  
Some sort of demonic nickname,  
They accuse him of getting his power from the ruler of the demons.

How does Jesus respond to this accusation?

This is his little piece of logic I referred to earlier.

*'How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup>If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup>And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup>And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come.'*

So Jesus basically says to the Scribes,

*'Your accusation assumes I'm actually delivering people from the influence of the evil one. What sense does it make to say I'm doing that by the power of that same evil one? Why would Satan undo his own work?'*

This little proverb about a house divided against itself not being able to stand resonates with us as a deep truth doesn't it?

If our own households and families are strong and united, we can face anything else life throws at us.

But if things are divided and chaotic at home,  
Everything else will be worse.

Jesus says to the Scribes,  
So Jesus dismantles their accusation.

But he also goes on to warn about the seriousness of what they're doing.

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

It's one thing to misunderstand who Jesus is or misinterpret his teaching or even simply fall into sin by saying careless words even about God,  
All this can be forgiven,

But when these guys who have met Jesus,

When they encounter his Spirit anointed ministry and they intentionally, determinedly, persistently and actively choose to not only reject it,

But to say it's evil,

That he who is from heaven is actually from hell,

Well then you're in real danger of getting to a place you can't come back from spiritually.

The old pastoral rule, by the way, about this so-called unforgivable sin,  
This blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,

Is that if you worry about committing this,  
That's evidence you have not.

People who go down this path aren't worried about whether they've offended God or not.

I think one application there could be here for us today,  
Is that this should lead us to be cautious about labelling things as demonic.

This can be a temptation for Christians,  
That one group claims something is a work of God,

And another group is very quick to claim it's of the devil.

This text I take as a sober caution about going down that path too quickly.

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### **DISCIPLES – DOING THE WILL OF GOD**

So there was the first group who responded by questioning Jesus' sanity,  
Resisting on the grounds of reason.

There was the second group who accused Christ of not doing God's work but Satan's.

Then there's the third group,

Interestingly, this group is not named.

Perhaps this is where you are to truly find yourself in this text?

<sup>32</sup>*A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.'* <sup>33</sup>*And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?'* <sup>34</sup>*And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'* <sup>35</sup>*Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'*

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Left on our own, we all resist the work of God's in our lives,

We all resist Christ and his Word.

Left on our own we are all in need of deliverance and rescue from the power of evil.

The Scriptures say that this whole world lies in the power of the devil.

Did you hear how Jesus described his work in this world?

They accuses him of being in league with Satan,  
But Jesus said what he was really up to.

He says:

*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.*

Jesus says yes, Satan is like a strong man,

He does have *power* and *influence*,

The evil in this world **does** makes people's lives miserable in all sorts of ways.

But Jesus,

Has come to bind him,

To undo his power,

It started in the wilderness when he resisted his temptations,

And it was finished on the cross when he disarmed the evil powers, triumphing over them. .

Jesus says he's not in league with Satan,

He's plundering his house,

He's releasing all those who are bound by him,

Jesus came to liberate you from the power of sin,

Death,

and the devil.

And by a miracle of God's Spirit,

He has drawn you to faith,

He has drawn you here today,

To be those who are gathered around Jesus.

And what else are we here to do,

But to do the will of God.

And as you hear the call to confess your sins,

And receive forgiveness in Jesus' name,

And as you hear the call to listen to his Word of Law and Gospel,

As you confess your faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

As you receive the body and blood of Jesus,

As you leave this house with his blessing seeking to live holy lives as he has made you holy,

Seeking to love and serve your neighbour as Christ has served you,

You are those gathered around Jesus,  
You are those doing the will of God,  
  
And Christ Jesus calls you his true brothers and sisters.

Don't miss how powerful this statement is.

I remember a scene in a famous movie,  
  
Where there are these two big tough gangster type guys,  
  
And one says to the other,  
he's always thought of him as a brother,  
  
and big tough guy has tears on his face,  
saying:  
*'I've always wanted to be thought of as a brother by you'.*

This not just pious language.

Jesus Christ,  
The true Son of God,  
  
Calls you his brother or sister.

That's where you want to be,  
In the household with him.

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## **CONCLUSION**

The resistance of those who called him crazy,  
  
The resistance of those who called him evil,  
  
And the faith and obedience of those who call him Lord.  
  
In the name of Jesus, Amen.