



Well, my dear Saints, I found this reading to be very interesting, and a little confronting, how about you?

Sometimes we read a passage and then really need to reflect on it and seek out some theological commentaries in order to help us understand and interpret the message intended for us. After the formal institution of the twelve apostles on the mountain, Jesus returns to a house situation, many amazing things happen on mountain tops throughout the scriptures, the serious teaching usually occurs when Jesus is seated, as with the Rabbi's, Here He assumes the teaching position.

Jesus is faced with misunderstanding and misinterpretation that carries forward the conflict now building up around him, and issues related to Jesus conquering the power of Satan. Throughout the scriptures there are many instances of evil spirits acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God, they are indeed a force to be reckoned with. We also see several instances of Jesus being tempted by the devil, good always overrides evil, eventually. Sometimes it seems to take longer that we want, e.g., Ukraine.

Once again, we see the gathering of huge crowds around Jesus, as they enthusiastically meet around the house it makes it impossible for Jesus to even have a meal. Jesus Mother, brothers and sisters arrive to sort things out. Probably because of these huge gatherings of people that seem to be getting out of control, they think that something strange is going on, they think Jesus has lost the plot and they come to take him home.

Of course, Jesus sees this as interfering with his ministry and mission, just as the authorities are suspicious and many others of the old school, they don't see the whole picture. Amazing, you can have something right under your nose and still not see it, Jesus family still did not understand the full complexity of Jesus as the Son of God, here on earth, human yet divine. Jesus family feel that whatever Jesus is doing to attract such wild enthusiasm as a sign of dangerous derangement, hence their aim is to remove him from the situation and take him home where he belongs. Jesus family don't exactly regard him as possessed, however the scribes from Jerusalem with their explicit charge that Jesus is indeed possessed is a more serious misunderstanding. This is a serious charge as it could result in a charge of practicing sorcery, a capital offence and made by legal authorities, who come from the national centre of power, Jerusalem.

Jesus rebukes these accusations, his association with Satan does not identify him as falling under the rule of Satan; as indicated by John the Baptist, Jesus is the "Stronger One", who, with the power of the Spirit has come to liberate human beings from the captivity associated with Satan's rule.

In verse 28, Jesus says "Truly I tell you; people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemies against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven, but is guilty of an eternal sin"- For they had said, (the authorities), that, "He has an unclean Spirit".

Next, we see Jesus family, his mother and brothers and sisters reappear in a further bid to take him home, to make contact with him. Jesus biological family come very much as outsiders at this point, they have to send a message through the crowd. Jesus makes no direct response but instead looks about, and identifies those sitting close by him as his mother and brothers, then adding more generally, that whoever does the will of God is "my brother, sister and mother". This Markan text clearly puts the natural family of Jesus into the same category as those that misunderstand Jesus and seek to divert him from his mission. At the same time, we see Jesus surrounded by a new family, defined as those who do the will of God.

Doing Gods will in this instance means understanding and acting in accordance with God's will, as the new Kingdom of God is emerging and breaking through and as I just said, this places Jesus natural family in the same position as the old era that the new Kingdom is supplanting. Those who do God's will by giving themselves to this new Kingdom find themselves in a new family gathered around Jesus. Mark shows the control exercised by the closest human relationships can inhibit full dedication to the Kingdom. Having said this, we find the negative implication that Jesus shows toward his family as troubling for us.

If we are looking for a rich theology of family life in the NT, we won't find it in Mark's Gospel, whatever may have been the attitude of Jesus, we find Mark has strong views and possibly reflects the situation of the community for which he wrote, where commitment to the Gospel requires a huge sacrifice, nothing interferes with the growing of the Kingdom, not even family. We must remember that this is not written for us today, to directly follow, as it was written in a different time and in different circumstances.

However, we are reminded that as followers of Jesus we must love him above all and be obedient to his will, then I find that everything else falls into place around this, family, friends etc. My Spiritual director and I had many conversations around Mark's attitude and I believe that spending time with a family member or friend that needs support is actually doing God's will, even though it appears to be taking us away from church activities and commitments. As we maintain this powerful commitment to Jesus in our hearts, we are indeed doing his will as we care for others. Derek and I often do Morning Prayer via zoom with the Singleton Parish and last year when my daughter was dealing with anxiety issues; she would often ring me early on her way to work as she was feeling anxious about her day, so I would miss MP. I felt that this was my 'Morning Prayer'. Even though I did miss it, I knew that Jesus was pleased that I spent that time with my daughter, listening mostly, and providing her with reassurance and support. Our family and friends are a gift to us from God and we do have an obligation to care for them and support them, as we see in the Ten Commandments, honour your Father and Mother.... And all the things we must not do to others, like stealing, killing etc,

I don't try to twist the scriptures to suit myself and our situation, but I do seek theologians' understandings and reflections to find the true meaning of difficult passages of scripture. Sometimes I don't find logical outcomes and just accept the words as they are, especially in some

of the Old Testament readings, I'm sure you know the ones, especially Kings, Judges, Joshua and more, if you want a bloodthirsty and lusty tale there are many in the OT.

This a whole new Sermon for another day, and I would need intensive preparation!!! Last Sunday evening at the Prayer, Praise and Proclamation Service, we reflected on the New Testament passage and then shared our interpretation with each other. It was wonderful, we can learn so much from each other as the Spirit moves us to find new insights and fresh words that lead us into a deeper relationship with Jesus and our Church family.

In other Gospels we find many references to family life in a more positive light, and in the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians, also 1 Timothy, it should also be noted that in Luke's Gospel there is a very positive portrayal of Mary, especially in the Infancy Story where it contains moments that she does not understand and has to ponder in her heart the mystery of all that is happening.

I would encourage you to reflect on the readings again when you go home, especially the Gospel reading, snuggle up in a nice cosy chair with a cuppa and see how the Spirit speaks to you, and if you want more excitement, join us this evening at the Prayer, Praise and Proclamation Service, 5pm, right here in this space, come and enjoy a snack and a cuppa as we share this special time with each other and our amazing God.

Amen