

Proper 5 Year B 2018

There's an old joke of which this passage from Mark reminds me. It goes something like this: How does one know that Jesus' mother is Jewish?... because she believes her son can walk on water. That's pretty funny, but it's not scriptural... It's not scriptural at least according to Mark. Our passage for today is situated just after Jesus calls his disciples as collaborators in the ministry of healing and political resistance... and just before he begins his teaching the crowds of Galilee. This passage gives us a little context in which this so-called Jesus movement takes place. Mark is painfully clear here that this emerging movement is being met with formidable resistance. The scribes, that is, the intellectual elite of his own people, have accused Jesus of being possessed by demons... and here in our passage even Jesus' family including his own mother are trying to hush him up. In the NRSV translation from which we just read we are told that the crowds were saying that Jesus was out of his mind, and that his family has showed up to restrain him... but other translations say that it is Jesus' mother and his family who say that he is quite out of his mind. In either case Jesus and his disciples and the growing number of followers are being met with angry opposition.

So we've been reading throughout Easter from the Gospel of John which is focused on Christology, that is, the theological identity of Jesus. And now and for the rest of the season after Pentecost we return to Mark, this being year B in the Lectionary, Mark's year. So let's remind ourselves of Mark's principal agenda. You'll remember that Mark begins his gospel with the Baptism of Jesus signaling as he puts it, the beginning of the Good News; that in baptism the kingdom of God begins in earnest. You should remember also that the prologue of ancient rhetoric, according to Aristotle, predisposes the coming theme... so Mark's gospel is about the Baptized; that is, it is about all who have been initiated into this grassroots movement whose charge it is to heal and to restore those on the outside of the circle of community. We noted last week that the resurrection appearances in Mark, thirteen of them if you're counting, are not focused on the Resurrection of Jesus, but that resurrection has to do with the shamed and alienated ones among us who are raised up into dignity and well-being. Another way to say that is that resurrection is the vocation of the baptized, and that at its heart resurrection is the process by which we live together justly, collaboratively, mutually... "respecting the dignity of every human being"... as we say in our baptismal covenant. And Mark is saying that such a vision will be resisted by the powers that be, the status quo; that it will be resisted by proper society; even by

the very people we love, and the people who love us. Mark is depicting a culture deeply divided between us and them, not unlike our culture today. For Mark there are two camps: those who support the power of the status quo, and those who choose to follow the will of God.

Today's reading from Mark is to my mind one of the so-called "hard teachings" of the gospels. It is a teaching about allegiance, and the cost of allegiance. We are being asked to choose here what is the bottom line for us as baptized Christians. The talk these days in our culture is that we are deeply divided...and the talk permeates secular society and the church. And apropos of such talk is the question of "why can't we just listen to each other better?" These days we bemoan a certain lack of empathy with those who think differently from us. There are now seminars all over the place on how we might listen to each other better; how we best might get along. I've just been at the Province IV synod meeting to prepare for General Convention. It is a gathering of clergy, priests, deacons, and bishops, and lay deputies from around the southeast... and it's the same talk... that the highest virtue of the church is that we get along. Let's just listen to each other. Let's just recognize and respect that you say tomato and I say tomahto.

But in our reading today, we are told that Jesus won't listen... He won't listen even to his mother and his family. They seek him out, as Mark puts it, "to restrain him," but Jesus won't hear them. He's told that his mother and his brothers and sisters would have a word with him, and his famous reply, or I should say infamous reply is: "who are my mother and my brothers? Those who do the will of God are my Mother, my sister, my brother."

This is about allegiance... and in particular the allegiance of the Baptized. Brothers and sisters, we don't have the luxury of the polite forbearance of opinions, much less actions, that are contrary to the will of God. And of course, many would say... but who would presume to know the will of God? Isn't that the rub? Isn't God's will a mystery subject to myriad interpretations? And I would say to that question: It is our very vocation as the Baptized to presume to know the will of God. How? Because of the one we follow... We follow Jesus... In the breaking of bread, and in the prayers; in the reading of sacred scripture; in the practice of the faith. I would hope that each one of you could speak eloquently and with all due erudition as to what it is that God wills for us and the world:

What was it that the prophet Micah said when asked what it was that God required of us? To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly. And the

scribes put a finer point to such a general admonition: We are to welcome the immigrant as if they were our own family. There are those who would separate children from their parents and put them in cages. If there are some that think that's O.K., don't listen to them. The mainstay of Jesus' ministry was healing. There are some who say adequate healthcare is a privilege, not a right. Don't listen to them. Jesus teaches that the poor are blessed by God, and yet there are some who argue that poverty is a choice, or that poverty reflects a lack of character. Don't listen to them. Jesus said to visit those in prison, and yet there are some who would treat the incarcerated as less than human, with no hope of a second chance. Don't listen to them. Jesus said blessed are the peacemakers, and yet there are some who argue that the violence of war is justifiable, and that might makes right. We spend more on our military in the U.S. than the next ten ranked nations behind us combined, exacerbating the national debt; and some call that strength. Don't listen to such nonsense. Jesus broke bread with outcasts, and yet there are those who scapegoat the gay and lesbian community shunning them from the dignity of full personhood. Don't listen to those people. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians said that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male or female, slave or free, and yet there are some who discriminate because of race or gender, or social status. Don't listen to them. According to the editors of Genesis,

we are stewards of creation, and yet there are some who think it's O.K. to pollute our air and water in the name of profit. Don't listen to them. You get the point.

God's will is that we love our neighbor with particular attention to outsiders, the lost and the least. The will of God according to our sacred lore handed down through the ages is that it is our vocation to restore the human family to the beloved community of equals, and that requires sacrifice, and denying oneself in deference to the good of the whole. God's will is that we love; and according to Paul, the apostle, love is patient and kind, and doesn't insist on its own way; Love is not envious; love doesn't boast; Love is never rude; Love never seeks its own advantage; Love doesn't hold a grudge; Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but finds its joy in the truth... and it is always ready to make allowances; it trusts always; and it is never without hope, and it will endure all things. We know this to be the truth, We've known it all along.

So good people, let us not pretend that we don't know the will of God. And when it comes to our allegiance, let it be for God's vision of a world restored. Let it be in solidarity with Jesus of Nazareth who gave his life for the Love of God... Love that sets the captives free, and sets a banquet table for those who have

never been invited there before... Let our allegiance be to the Love of God that is drawing all people to Godself.

If in this world that is so divided, if you hear argument to the contrary. Remember who your family is, and where your allegiance lies... don't bother hearing that which is contrary to the truth we know... save your energy.... save it for the work ahead... save it for the ones who need it... Save it for love.... Let the Good news begin in earnest.