

## Mark 3:20-35

This time Jesus is coming home. Our instincts and associations of home and family immediately shape our expectations as to how this even will unfold. Robert Frost summed it up well in *The Death of the Hired Man* “Home is the place where when you have to go there they have to take you in.” But the cast of characters and the narrator of our gospel story had not read Frost. Of this that little word “again” that begins our reading is so important a pointer.

We are just beginning the long journey of Pentecost. We might be permitted to breathe deeply and hunker down for the long haul. But as many readers of Mark remind us the pace of the story will not let us relax. We seem only barely to have begun, yet in these first few chapters Jesus has whirled through Galilee—baptized at the Jordan, the Spirit alights on him and God’s benediction of choice is pronounced, his opening words announce the presence of God’s kingdom and call for a response to this good news; he walks by the sea and summons fisher folk to follow, and they fairly leap from their boats in obedient response; in a synagogue he teaches with an astounding authority, but a kind of secrecy enshrouds him which only the demonic seems to recognize; yet a secret power breathes from him that will not be contained, as witnessed by the numerous events of healing that mark his route. This is Jesus, God’s chosen, after all, and if the kingdom is indeed at hand, then we might well ask, How is one supposed to act in the presence of God?

So now Jesus comes home. Up to this point even with all the excitement, the reports and prospects have not been good. Even as Jesus continues to heal and to draw crowds and disciple followers, he

has to skirt around in the border regions and escape to the mountains. The upshot has been that already only this far in the story the Pharisees and the Herodians conspire how they can destroy him. It is telling that the last named disciple Jesus calls is Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him-the past tense would seem to mark this already as essentially a done deal. So when at the beginning of today's reading we join the crowds, packed together so tightly that they can't even get their arms free to grab some food, we sense that somebody has to do something to restore some order.

And for that his family is ready? Yes, they come ready with restraints to shackle his body and with charges to tame his outlandish speech "he's out of his mind; you don't really need to listen to him. And the scribes from Jerusalem add a religious stamp to the charges "he is actually in league with the demonic powers" That should take care of any mistaken assumptions and relegate to insignificance the clamoring crowds. Those in the know have the essential facts to discount his person and his credentials. Enough said about this Jesus. The threats to the ordering of society, family and religion have been thwarted once again.

So what will Jesus answer to these charges? He seems to offer some help to alleviate the uproar when he picks up a theme with us from the beginning: the talk is about the kingdom and about who has authority and power. But as usual his words are always in riddles. But to those who have ears to hear, perhaps we hope, especially to us, his riddles make sense. They call us to consider deeply just what is going on here-to rethink what the story of this Jesus might have to do with how we imagine our world and the ways of God with God's creation. What is it that God is calling us to see and hear in this Jesus? Who is it that has

the power to change our world, and how is that power going to be exercised in those of us who are called to journey along with this Jesus in the Pentecost Season?

The answers to these questions are not always so clear. They will call for a people who are aware of the risk of listening to the wrong sources, who are aware of the risk of joining in the wrong, words whose error becomes so much blasphemy. In this Jesus the Spirit of God is at work. That much has been signed in the beginning, in the descent of God's Spirit upon him at his baptism. God's benediction on him has been pronounced; the promise is that in his journey among and with us God will be at work. To question or reject that presence and the sign of this kingdom is to risk missing out on the good news that God has in store for us in the person and message of this Jesus.

There are no guarantees in our hearing. Even those who have all the proper credentials-whose blood lines would seem to link them to this Jesus, or who claim status among the leaders of the temple in Jerusalem-are ultimately at risk for missing out on the journey. Jesus puts it very directly. It is not status but action in response to the call of God in the person of this Jesus that makes what it means to belong to his 'family' The would seem to sum it all up simple and to the point. Relationships in this family are dynamic; they flow from the encounter and response to this Jesus.

And yet, at this point in the journey, there remains a hiddenness or mystery to it all. Relationship in this family are couched in terms of "doing the will of God". But at this point in the story, just what that "will of God" entails is not specifically detailed. For those of us who thrive on lists, who need "things to do" to establish some comfort level, this story of Jesus will not comply with our wishes. We will have to be

willing to come along for the journey. We will just have to trust this Jesus and in the invitation to join him and to believe that in his company we will participate in the unfolding of the good news of God's kingdom among us in in our world. Amen