

Sermon for Sunday, June 6, 2021 - "Drawn Into Belonging"

Second Sunday after Pentecost
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
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Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Who is inside and who is outside? That's a key question to ask of the stories in the Gospel of Mark. Mark helps us see that Jesus is all about disrupting our perceptions of insiders and outsiders. Sometimes that happens on a more metaphorical level but our story today has an actual door separating insiders from outsiders.

Outside the door stand Jesus' mother and siblings and some scribes. They represent the major pillars of society - the family and the synagogue. You'd expect them to be the insiders, but they remain outside.

Inside the door, Jesus is having a meal with his newly called ragtag bunch of disciples. Those inside also include a whole crowd of people who've come together, desperate for help from Jesus. These likely are people who've been cast out by society and their families because they're sick or demon possessed. They have profound needs. They're pressing around Jesus so much that he can't eat.

The unruly mob has Jesus' family concerned. The family is also hearing some strange things about Jesus: people saying he is out of his mind, the scribes claiming he is possessed by Satan. Jesus is being so disruptive, not acting like you'd expect a man of God to behave. This is all troubling to Jesus' mother and siblings. They come to intervene but, as Mark makes a point of telling us, they remain standing outside. Why don't they just go inside to talk to Jesus?

Maybe they're afraid of these people and all their needs. Maybe they want to be of help, but just aren't sure what to do. Maybe they're worried about what the scribes will say about them if they join the crowd inside. For whatever reason, Jesus' mother and siblings stay outside and summon Jesus to come to them.

Jesus responds with a gesture that takes in all those inside seated around him: "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." In that simple gesture, Jesus disrupts and reorders major social norms. The social pillar type people are no longer the insiders with all the influence. Those the world views as outsiders are given a central role. They are drawn into belonging, given a new family. **And**, this does not mean that those standing outside are excluded. Jesus works to draw them, and all of us, into life as the family of God.

Pr. Steve Garnaas-Holmes puts it this way: In a culture where family is right up there with God, maybe higher, Jesus says, "Yeah, family is it. But family isn't blood. It's love." ... No more tiny family with my little fence around those who I care for, who I'm responsible to. Instead, you give me this infinite family. All those who follow you differently than I do, I belong to them. We are one. I am to care as much about strangers as my own sister, respect opponents no less than my own brother,

honor people so unlike me as my own mother. And this miracle, though it seems hard to love them all as if they are mine, when I do, I come home.

Jesus works to draw us all into this way of belonging to God and to one another. Yet so often we remain standing outside. Sometimes we are the desperate, hurting ones who know we need Jesus, who have no choice but to rely upon Jesus and others. Yet so often we remain outside, concerned about the things we hear about Jesus. He is so radical, so disruptive. Really, it's better to make changes gradually and take social norms seriously. We stand outside judging. Maybe we're afraid of people with so many needs. We want to be of help, but just aren't sure what to do. Maybe we're worried about what others will say about us. Maybe, honestly, we're concerned about losing our influence and standing. Maybe if *they* get help there won't be enough for me.

Whatever the reason, certainly we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. Certainly, there are evil powers in this world - powers that manifest today as white supremacy, homophobia, ableism, sexism. These powers work to keep us divided, to keep us separated from God and from one another. We are captive to sin, bound by evil that conspires to keep us outside of the life God intends for us to know.

The good news is that Jesus doesn't stand outside all this hoping things will change. Jesus enters into this world to confront the powers of this world, to bind them up and cast them out. In his life, death and resurrection, Jesus has entered the strong man's house, Satan's house, to restrain evil and cast it out from within each of us. Jesus works to set us all free: those standing outside judging, those in the desperate crowd, all of us.

Each week in worship, Jesus proclaims words of forgiveness and freedom to each of us. These words, this simple gesture, reorders our hearts and our lives. We are set free from the power of sin and assured that we are claimed by God and filled with the Holy Spirit.

By the power of the Holy Spirit at work in Jesus, nothing can keep us outside of God's love. By the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us, nothing is unforgivable.

Whether you feel like one of those in desperate need of Jesus or one of those who is standing outside, Jesus is present today to set you free and draw you in. You belong to God and the whole family of God. You can live out the love that God wills for us to know and to share.