

# Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Mark 3:33-35

Virginia Urbanek

Mark 3:33-35 Jesus replied to them 'who are my brothers and sisters?' and looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

How often have you heard that salutation?...We say it so often at the beginning of sermons or at the start of every official act and communication we receive from the powers that be. We have today's Gospel to thank for that, for Jesus does indeed call us brothers and sisters. (And, what a great text for a leave taking Sunday) In using a human relationship he helps us to understand the relationship we have with him and each other. My own family, as with all large families, (not Fitzpatrick large) was and is a microcosm of life. Brown hair, brown eyes, blonde hair, blue eyes, blonde hair brown eyes, right handed, left handed, glorious voices of my brothers, a voice that is always sharp in one of my sisters, a Vietnam War protester in one of my brothers, a career Army officer's wife in my sister. A teacher, a banker, a scientist, a sister who likes to read the tax laws for the fun of it, you get the gist. My brothers used to play ball in the yard and laughed at my inability to ever catch a ball. We had varied gifts, varied interests and physical attributes and yet each in our own ways lived the lives of compassion instilled in us by my parents, played out in different ways in our life. Sometimes we lived in the tenuous state of agreeing to disagree. Sometimes there were periods where one or the other of us did not speak to another (until my Dad cut through the nonsense and settled it). But no matter what the circumstance we were still brother and sister.

When Jesus brings us the image of family we get it because family is relate-able. We see the joy but also the fallibility of humanity in it. You and I, the "this is us" we celebrate here today, are brothers and sisters bound together not by DNA but by our faith in Jesus Christ, and the Gospel message that lives in us. Jesus has gathered us as he gathered all people from the wayside, each of us with our own needs, whether our lives are going smoothly, or falling apart; our health vibrant or failing, our lives just beginning, or slowing down with possibilities ebbing. To each of us Jesus has said "You are my brother. You are my sister." If that is true, then we are the brothers and sisters of each other. As different as we are, as varied as our gifts and opinions are, it is our faith that holds us together, our faith in the reality of Jesus' sacrifice for us and His call to us to be faithful to our faith.

Thank God that faith holds us...we have had to navigate some pretty rocky waters together, especially over the last two years. Our differences in politics, gun rights, immigration, and drugs are much more of a challenge to live with

than different hair colors, or vocal ability. Might have been easier to ignore those problems and call a Sunday hiatus. And yet most of the time as luck and the lectionary would have it our lessons for the Sunday would not let us ignore the realities of our daily life. Jesus would not let us go. "Deal with this", he seemed to be saying. We have prayed and prayed. We have shared personal heartaches knowing that this is our family. We have cried together when yet another national tragedy has struck. This week with the news filled with stories of the increase in suicides and the suicide deaths of two celebrities, we have had to acknowledge that very often our public personas do not collide with our private thoughts of self.. Honesty eludes us. We have looked at the realities of sin in this world and we have asked "what would Jesus do?" One thing is for sure: Jesus would not ignore the truth. He would look the truth straight in the eye and spit it out. Truth telling was Jesus' middle name. It was that truth telling that led to his death.

So we ask "what would Jesus want us to do?" Together we have learned that sweeping things under the rug is not an option. We have had to look at the uncomfortable truth that what seems like an obvious solution or political viewpoint to one might not be to another. We have had to push respect to the limit. As your priest I have felt compelled to hold Jesus' words up "love God. Love your neighbor" not as a platitude, but as an everyday challenge. Our lives are no different than the life of Jesus of the Gospel. Evil seems to swirl around him, as it swirls around us. Jesus is trying to begin a radical ministry, gathering around him his ministry team, the apostles, healing people that others ignore, facing life with honesty and compassion and courage, so much so that in the Gospel people have begun to think that he is out of his mind, possessed by the devil. He calls us to speak the same truth.

More than confronting evil, Jesus would say to the "this is Us" crowd gathered here, find joy in each other. Get together, gather to hear Jesus speak, celebrate the Jesus' family reunion at the altar. Let those little noisy, wiggly persons in the front row with their big bright eyes and outstretched hands fill you with joy and hope, Gather them as Jesus did in your arms knowing that of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Hold tightly to the words we use so often: in baptism "you are marked as Christ's own forever" whether that baptism was in this sanctuary or down in the river; or in the words at the time of death "into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend your servant." "in sure and certain hope of the resurrection"; or at the altar, "This my body. This is my blood" Or at confession "Almighty God, have mercy upon you, forgive all your sins. Strengthen you,"

Before the Gospel we sang one of my favorite (I know how many favorites does she have?) hymns. I love the words of the fourth verse "Now let us be a vessel for God's redeeming word" It is a powerful image to me ...we, you and I, hold the Gospel message. Our imperfect bodies and selves hold God's most perfect message of love and forgiveness. That is a powerful message for today's

world unable to be honest, afraid to let go, afraid to love, more anxious to hate than to love. Now, that imperfect vessel might need a patch job on occasion, (think confession and absolution), there might be times when we put the vessel up on a shelf, like a china teacup, save it for good, look at it, think our faith is pretty, take it down for special occasions, like Christmas and Easter. Then we need to encourage one another, to invite each other to the altar for a "This is Us" family reunion. We leave that altar as we will say in the post communion prayer "forgiven healed, renewed" with a powerful message to share."



