

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 3:20-35

***"A Family Affair"***

There is a lot going on in today's Holy Gospel. What Jesus has been doing and teaching has taken off like hot cakes – from the Galilee, to Jerusalem, and even to Nazareth. The Temple Leadership is pouring fuel onto the fire – even to the point of calling Jesus possessed by the devil! And then, the Gospel says that even Jesus' own family begins to think that He is mad. Jesus must be making quite a stir and gathering quite a bit of attention.

Crowds are gathering even in the house where Jesus and the Apostles are staying, and are so "needy" that they are not leaving Jesus alone, so much so that they are unable to eat. Jesus' family joins in the hubbub. The Gospel says this: *"When His family heard about this, they went to take charge of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind.'"* Let me try to clarify this for you, some translations said – *"to go take him into custody."* Another said, *"to take charge of him"*, while another said, *"to restrain him."* We will talk more about others in Jesus' family before we are done.

Mary, Jesus' mother, at this early stage of Jesus' ministry, did not have any idea what He was up to. Wasn't it Mary who asked Jesus to change the water into wine at the wedding in Cana? Yes, she knew who He was, she had not forgotten about the Angel Gabriel, and what took place in Bethlehem, so do not start thinking that Mary lost faith in Him, and we will come back to this. She knew Who He was, but she might not have expected the type of response that was happening to His ministry. She had brought the rest of the family to Capernaum from Nazareth in order to find Him and take Him away. We do not know - it could have been to give Him a break, or it very well might have been to stop Him from behaving in such an outrageous fashion, we do not know, thinking it might bring dishonor to the family name. But God is starting a new family, a new hope, a new holy people, and He is doing so without regard for ordinary human family bonds. And then we hear from the teachers of the Law who follow Jesus around and are constantly trying to trip Him up. They arrive first, from Jerusalem. and they say: *"He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."*

We need to remember that Jesus is healing people who seem to be in the grip of demonic forces. John the Baptist said that Jesus was *"one more powerful than I."* (Mark 1:7) Jesus now speaks about tying up the strong man and plundering his house, wanting us to understand that He is now acting as the Stronger One, who has won an initial victory over the enemy. He is referring to the temptation by the devil in the wilderness just after His baptism in the Jordan, and He is now on a mission – heading directly into the enemy's territory. The Teachers of the Law, of course, do not like what He is doing because it does not fit into their agenda. Jesus is not one of them and so they feel they have to discredit Him, and take Him down a notch, so that people will no longer take Him seriously. They say Jesus has got to be in league with the devil and then even worse, they say He is possessed by the evil one. Their backs are against the wall and so they strike out against Jesus any way they can.

I just love it that Jesus does not respond in a way that we might; He does not lash back with a smart retort, but simply points out the flaw in their thinking. Jesus shows them the flaws in their logic. If the enemy, the accuser (the word in Hebrew is '*the satan*'), were to cast out "the satan," he (or it) is fighting against himself. See, their logic is totally flawed! If the devil is fighting the devil, the devil's kingdom is obviously coming to an end. And so even if their analysis is correct, the kingdom of "the satan" is toppling.

Jesus is not just a 'mildly interesting historical figure', as some in today's culture might label Him, or as a prophet, or a "great teacher" – there are lots of labels that have been bandied around trying to neutralize Jesus and keep Him out their way. You are here on a Sunday morning in church because you believe that Jesus is Who He says He is! Those who preach and live by Jesus' message need to be on the alert for opposition of all sorts; there is a spiritual war going on, which sometimes is subtle, and sometimes it is threatening, and we as Christians, must learn how to respond.

I believe that the leaders of the Temple chose to accuse Jesus – playing a sort of shell game - because Jesus really was acting in the power and spirit of Israel's God Himself. That would mean that everything else He was doing – welcoming outcasts, announcing the kingdom in a way which stood everything upside down, would all be God's work, even though it seemed, to the Pharisees at least, as though it was going in exactly the opposite direction to what they thought God wanted.

The Pharisees, as much as they hated Jesus, could not deny His miracles, which growing great in number and much too well known to deny. Word of His work had spread, and now crowds were gathering even in the home they were staying, to the point that they were not even able to eat! Even though the miracles were all miracles of help and healing, the Pharisees attributed them to Satan, and satanic origin. Either they accepted these miracles being from God, and then they had to accept Jesus, or the miracles had to be done in the power of Satan, since they were clearly supernatural and superhuman in origin. It was their own accusations, rather than Jesus' miracles, that were inspired by "the satan." By denying the power of the Holy Spirit, and claiming His work was from the evil one – they were committing the unpardonable sin, denying the works of the Holy Spirit. Once you label what is in fact the work of the Holy Spirit as the work of the devil, there is no way back – you have done it – you have committed that sin. In Mark 3:28-29 Jesus puts it this way "*I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.*" Rejecting Jesus, while He was on earth and rejecting His work which as of yet was unfinished, and even when His disciples did not understand Him, Jesus said that was all forgivable. But after His work was completed and the Holy Spirit had come, and access to God Himself, when the Temple veil was torn in two from top to bottom, when the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost, when that happened, then the deliberate, final rejection of the Holy Spirit's offer of Jesus Christ's Divinity and His offer of salvation would constitute the eternal sin for which there is no forgiveness, ever!

It is not always the vocal opponents of Christ who commit the unforgivable sin. Paul, when he was still Saul of Tarsus, was probably the biggest enemy of Christendom. He was out to get any of the believers of Jesus. He wanted to do them in! He was as vocal and active against Christ as anyone, he persecuted Christians, He wanted Peter's head on a stick - but Jesus called him personally to be His apostle on the road to Damascus. "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?*" (Acts 9:4) "*Who are you, Lord?*" Saul asked. "*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,*" he replied." (Acts 9:5) The deliberate, final rejection of the Holy Spirit's offer of Jesus is more likely to result in a total indifference rather than a vocal opposition to Christ.

I did not forget about Mary, Jesus' mother, and His family? In verses 31-35 "*Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him.*" "*A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.'*" Remember Matthew said that they thought He was "*out of His mind!*" More proof that their words or thoughts were not unforgivable. Jesus then goes on to answer with a question: "*Who are my mother and my brothers?*" he asked." "*Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'*" Jesus' reply teaches that spiritual ties are stronger than natural ties and He suggests that His family was no closer to Him than anyone else who does the will of God. That should be hope for all of us to know that we are considered Jesus' family. We know that Mary stood at the foot of His cross, faithfully standing by her Son, and both scripture and tradition tell us that Jesus' brothers James and Jude not only became His followers, disciples of Jesus, but wrote the Epistles of James and Jude. If they thought that He was crazy, then why did they come alongside Him in ministry at the end? I think, and this is just my opinion, that they wanted to get Him out of that house that was so filled with people, to give Him a break! To sort of rescue Him. I think it is important for us to know that what happened in the end was most important. Mary stood by her son. James and Jude stood by Him so much that they wrote epistles.

Remember last weeks' sermon when Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be reborn? It troubled Nicodemus – and then Jesus told him that "*God so loved the world that He sent His One and only Son – that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life!*" We are familiar with the strength and blessing of this family that we call the Body of Christ – as we personally experience the power of that sense of family right here at St. Andrew's Anglican Church! "*Here are my mother and my brothers!*" "*Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.*" I will take that family any time!