

St. John's Episcopal Church
Hamlin, Pennsylvania
The Rev'd. Ronald Royce Miller, Ph.D.
Third Sunday After Pentecost
10 June 2018

Scripture readings:

Genesis 3:8-15

Psalm 130

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Mark 3:20-35

Well, Jesus is in real trouble this morning. His family thinks he's nuts, and the church says he's demon-possessed. That's possibly being between a rock and a hard place. And here we are, the Body of Christ, believing and teaching and confessing and proclaiming ourselves to be the Body of Christ in the world today. I think from time to time we find ourselves between a rock and a hard place.

Last night after I was in bed, it occurred to me that this very gospel text worked out in my own life. Yesterday I e-mailed my older brother, who lives in Florida, to remind him that my younger brother, who lives in north Catasauqua, is to celebrate his birthday on the 13th. As you might know, neither of my brothers is on the same page with me politically - hard to imagine! *[laughter]* In my e-mail I said, "*I am writing to you because the two of you have a lot in common,*" to which my older brother responded, "*Yes, we do have a lot in common. Are you thinking of joining us?*" *[laughter]*

Well, it's precisely the position that Jesus was in. The church and the state are coming to Jesus and saying, "*Don't you want to shut up?! You're in trouble.*" You may have noticed that Jesus' mother is standing outside. She is not within earshot of Jesus. She is not hearing what he is saying. The scribes and others come with the accusation already in their arsenal that he is demon-possessed. They're not listening to what he says either. And so it is, I think, in the atmosphere and electricity in which we all live today, there is a lot of not hearing going on.

I can't believe I'm going to admit this to you, but I...(it's not *that* bad - *[laughter]*)...I have become grateful for electronic communication for this reason: it allows me to get all of my glorious, rational thinking in order and in print and expressed - when I push the "send" button I know that I've said everything that I wanted to, could, or think should be said. There's one for technology!

But the point is this: Jesus' rock and a hard place is that the church and his family are not happy with what he is saying. Now neither of them has bothered at this point - or at least in this text - to listen to him. His mother is probably embarrassed because he looks like a jerk. The church apparently is threatened and thinks he is a jerk or a demon or demon-possessed. It seems to me pretty clear that the church thinks he's a threat.

If any of us can agree on anything about Jesus, it seems to me it's that he spoke the truth and lived the truth. What is that truth that Jesus is speaking? I think it's a very simple and straightforward truth which can be gotten by us on the first page of scripture. By the way, the text we read from Genesis this morning...in my early ministry I served a congregation that was still worshiping in German, and the Germans would look at this text and say, "*This proves that God spoke German because the German Bible says, 'Adam, wo bist du?'*" *[laughter]*

But on the first page of scripture we encounter a Creator God who creates the whole world, everything in the world - now get this - everybody in the world, and God stands back from her creation (you don't think God wears trousers), God stands back from God's creation and looks at what God made and is pleased, satisfied, loves who and what has been created. And that includes *you* - you dirty, rotten sinner, *you* - you louse, you Democrat, you Republican, you Independent. God loves everybody south of the Rio Grande, whether or not there's a wall in it, and get this - probably in Canada, too, before there's a wall! The Holy Father this morning did pray for success with discussions in the Korean Peninsula.

Jesus' message is radical, and it's radical to and for all of us, and radical to and for the entire world. Now you and I both know that what Jesus believed in and preached and taught was true. I think in this gospel text what is being called an unforgivable sin against the Spirit is the sin of calling truth "fake news." That's unforgivable. Facts are facts. We used to say you can't change the facts.

So here is Jesus being seen as a threat by church and society, as a nut by his own family because he does not agree to join up with his brothers (and you can be sure they were brothers and not sisters in the church) and he doesn't quite sign up to his family's expectation that he become a nice, high salary earning professional, but runs around with this crazy idea that he is entirely, unconditionally himself loved by God and comes to this extraordinary insight that if

he can believe this about himself, he therefore must believe it about everybody else. Now that's the secret insight, friends. If there *is* one - that those who cannot believe that God loves the world and all who are in it - I would lay dollars to doughnuts - do not believe that they are fully and unconditionally loved by God. You can't believe and accept that grace and use it hypocritically. It just doesn't wash!

The other insight about doing what Jesus did - which was speaking the truth to power - he contradicts all of what you hear in terms of prosperity gospel on the tv. He doesn't get a pink Cadillac, he doesn't get an increased income, his bills are not paid because he believes this, his diseases are not healed because he prays the right prayers often enough or sends in enough money or has the magic water or the lovely cloth to wipe over whatever needs wiping over. What he gets for his position is executed. That's his reward. But when he dies, he dies with his integrity fully intact, and he dies being able to say to the crooks on his left and right, (and I think he said it to both. Don't you?) "*Today you will be with me in paradise.*" And those crooks, just like you and I, know that that paradise and our admission to it has nothing to do with our lives but with God's grace for us who do not deserve it - that God's unmitigated love is not only for us but for everyone else in the world. So you can use all the clever arguments you want, it is an unforgivable blasphemy to say that children should be separated from their parents for whatever reason because of where they were from or which side of the border they live on. That is unforgivable!

So we are with Jesus today between rocks and hard places, and we are learning that it's an exhausting place to be. I don't know about you, but I watch less and less television. Want to buy mine? *[laughter]* My friends Jack and Ruth Elstad in south Jersey have a friend who lives without a tv. I remember when I bought a tv in my first parish. Do you remember when the rocket went up and blew apart - the Challenger? I didn't have a tv at that point because it had burned out and I didn't replace it. That's the day I went out and got one.

The point of all of this is we live in a tough place between a rock and a hard place, but in a very exciting position in the world, and if we can work the wonder of helping people to hear what it is Jesus said by saying what Jesus said (which is the truth) in the fashion that Jesus said it (with love) to those who need to hear it (those in power), we cannot believe that the reward will be a pink Cadillac. It's not cosmetics. In fact, it's the opposite of cosmetics. It's taking off the mask and looking at the truth.

I don't ever want you to hear me say, "*Oh, that's all right. If they kill you, you'll get your reward in heaven.*" That kept people enslaved for a long time. But I do want you to think about what it is you claim to be when you call yourself a Christian - a little Christ - and when you gather here and participate in the Body of Christ and take your membership in this body somewhat seriously. Does it mean we'll all agree? No! Does it mean we can have a discussion? You'd better believe it! Does it mean we can talk about the issues rather than ignore them for fear of stepping on somebody's toes? I hope so!

And let me tell you this about my brothers and I - as deeply as we disagree, I think each of us would fall for the other. We do love each other, and it is possible to enjoy love as well as to express and take different positions

And so it is Jesus understood the difference between his relatedness to his mother and - get this - his biological brothers *and sisters*.. Did you see how that comment about sisters occurs once and then is deleted. I think the biblical scholars might attribute that to what is politely known as a redactor or an editor - a man!

So here we have it - Jesus having to bravely speak God's love to the authorities that oppose him and to his family who love him and, friends, remembering to pay the price for them in the knowledge and confidence of God's love for us and for all people. This is the church of Jesus Christ. This is not a picnic. This is a feast of God's presence and love and salvation for us and for all people everywhere in all times and places. The guests at this banquet are the saints of the church, not six-legged insects upon whom we step because we find them bothersome. This is God's place, God's house, God's table, and we are all guests at this meal!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.