

In this third chapter of Mark, we find Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. He had just completed a tour around Galilee, and then decided to make a trip to his hometown of Nazareth, but already he was becoming a household name. Wherever he went, the crowds gathered. And Jesus, being who he was, couldn't ignore them.

Now his family didn't understand the change that had come over him. He had been gone for some time, and they started hearing stories. It seems like the people who know us best are the ones who are the most startled by changes in us and our lives, and the family of Jesus was no exception. Were they embarrassed, were they angry, or were they simply really concerned by his recent actions? Whatever the case, the stories and the crowd troubled them, and they went out to get him. This was no gentle plea to come inside away from the crowd. The Greek verb used here indicates a full-on intervention. They thought he had gone mad and sought to quiet him before he got himself hurt or arrested.

And they had cause to be concerned. Because not only was his family upset, but the scribes were angry, too. So much so, they had trailed him back from Jerusalem, certainly with the intent to silence him or at the least discredit him, which they tried to do, by accusing him of doing the work of Beelzebul, literally the Lord of the Flies. The scribes figured that the people would shrink away from him if they, part of the religious elite, were to condemn his practices as demonic.

So what had caused this stir? Why was his family so scared, and why were the scribes so angry? In a very short time, Jesus had been teaching and healing people of their ailments and mental maladies. He had offered the forgiveness of sins. He had called disciples including a tax collector. He associated with people of low repute. He preached in the synagogues. He worked on the Sabbath, in opposition to the Jewish Law. He argued Torah with the scribes and the teachers of the law. And he did all this throughout the entire region of Galilee. And the people loved him for it.

The scribes accused him of practicing the demonic, of using evil powers to turn the people away from the God and the Jewish Law. Jesus knew that the world was full of evil. He saw the structures of power and oppression at work within Galilee and within Israel. He saw how the Law of God had been distorted into a tool to use against others and to marginalize people by placing them into categories of impure and unclean. Instead of following scripture that called for compassion and justice and the building up of the weak, Jesus saw a religious system that had fallen prey to the evils of the world around it. Religion was used to condemn others, not help them. It was to create barriers between people, rather than to break down those barriers. It was

focused more on following rules than following God. And it was susceptible to the corruption and brokenness of the world around it. And so instead of helping people, it hurt them.

Jesus scoffed at their accusations. I can imagine him thinking, what have you seen me doing? I have been freeing people from their bondage to sin. I have released them from the pain of their ailments. I have presented God as one who loves more than nitpicky laws and who cares for all people equally regardless of their station in life. I have preached against power and destructive forces. I have encouraged loving one another and offered forgiveness and mercy. I have brought them hope. How can any of that be labeled the work of the demonic?

And to his family, who accuse him of being out of his mind, crazy. They want him to give up his crusade. Turn away from the crowds. Come back to the carpenter's bench. Stay out of the notice of the religious leaders. Don't make trouble. Don't bring shame upon your family. This is a culture in which family meant everything. One's lineage was important and family was responsible to one another.

But for Jesus, turning away from his mission was not an option. If they could not understand his vision of God, he had to break ties with them. He had to move forward. Those who chose to follow him, to become the people that God had created them to be. To be loving and compassionate and just. To embrace freedom from the structures and bonds of the world. Those people were his new family. He had begun this path of sharing the truth about God, and there was no turning back from that mission.

It seems really, that not much has changed since the first century. The bonds of the world are just as strong and seductive as they've always been. They promise security by playing on our fears. They scapegoat others by blaming them for the insecurities we experience. They provide answers through absolutes. They label and judge based on human categories of so-called worthiness, they divide groups into us and them, they promote hate and mistrust and narrowmindedness.

It is so easy to fall prey to easy answers and accept a vision of how things should be in blacks and whites. But when we step out in faith and journey on the path of following Jesus, we find that there are no easy answers and we see that the world is an amazing palette of all shades of grey. And maybe people will call us crazy to follow such a vision. Maybe they will. But I'm okay with that. Are you?