

Bennochy church 10th June 2012

There are passages in scripture where you really wonder what is going on, what do they mean? Why has the writer included them? For me, this part of Mark 3, read earlier, is one such passage. It seems all mixed up and not even particularly well written. It jumps around, from the relationship between Jesus and his family, a controversy with religious leaders and a couple of really strange parables.

Is there anything that holds the passage together? There seems to be some tenuous threads; madness and Satan. Sounds an interesting combination to preach on!

Was Jesus, like many normal families, not getting on together, because of what he was saying and doing? Did they believe what the crowds were saying? He's mad, so we better, for his own sake, and possibly their own reputation, go and deal with the situation, get him out of harm's way and see if we can understand what is going on.

Or, let's knock some sense into him. Yes, he seems to be popular, but this antagonism with the religious leaders

can only go one way. Maybe their family instinct was to protect him by possibly declaring him insane! Families do that sometimes, to protect reputation and try to take people they love out of harm's way. They want to control, when it might be best to let the individual make their own way in the world. You can imagine them rushing down the street to find Jesus. Anxious, concerned and wondering how has he got himself into this mess?

Others had a different view. The religious leaders saw the miracles of Jesus through different eyes. You can only drive out demons if you are possessed yourself. The language is strange to us, but in 1st century Palestine this understanding was not seen as unusual. Mental illness or any strange behaviour was readily identified with demon possession. He's mad! However, this is madness with religious overtones.

Jesus was challenging the religious establishment, so confrontation was going to happen. Here it is all about who has power and where does that power come from, Satan or God? To the crowds he might be viewed as a miracle worker, prophet or mad man, to the religious leaders he was seen as a threat. What lies at the heart of

everyone's response to Jesus, is a failure to understand who Jesus was. So tension is mounting.

The strange parables have at their root a common sense view of the controversy. If you are divided you will not stand. If the power of evil is the source of illness and disease says Jesus, why would I, demon possessed, come and heal people? Come on guys, wake up and think about this logically. The strength of God is greater than the power of Satan. I was tempted in the wilderness and I won! This is all about who Jesus is. However, logic does not stand against accusations of madness and biased view points.

Do people today see us as mad, for what we believe or just a bit eccentric or more probably just irrelevant? Unfortunately, many of our controversies tend to be internal, leaving society to wonder what all the fuss is about. *"If a family divides itself into groups which fight each other, that family will fall apart"* (v 25)

I firmly believe God will forgive us anything we ask, but some will reject him so intensely that forgiveness is not possible? So the Spirit is grieved. Is that what Jesus is

saying to his family, the crowds or to the religious authorities. The idea that the power of forgiveness is actually in our hands, for we need to allow the 'strong man' in to release our chains. There is no doubt that these are difficult verses to grapple with.

The family finally arrive, but can't get into see Jesus because of the crowd, so a note is sent. Jesus, your family is outside and they want to see you. Today we would text.

This passage begins and ends with the family and they get a shock. Probably waiting for Jesus to come out, they discover a hard hitting theological truth. The family of God is not biological; it is those who do the will of God. For the Jews this is a shocking statement!

We can only imagine the family's response! Did they have theological debate on the merits of Jesus words? I doubt it. Did they storm off in a huff, who knows? We are left only with our imaginations.

We started with madness, and by a convoluted route via Satan we have arrived at the will of God. In spite of what people think of our faith, we are asked to stand together

not around family ties, but the family of God seeking the will of God.

Jesus is here making a very specific point. He is not anti family; the family here are part of the context of what Jesus is saying. They 'bookend' the story, but beyond them he says is a wider family, held together by the strong ties of love, grace & faith. On this particular occasion his biological family takes second place.

Jesus asks us to be focused in our discipleship based on two great commandments. The greatest is to love God with all our heart, soul and mind. The second, is to love our neighbours, both family and even enemies, as we love ourselves. Amen.