

We Are The Family of God

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Mark 3:31-35 ³¹Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters^[c] are outside, asking for you." ³³And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

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Jesus stops the action in our text today and asks a strange question. He asks, "Who is my family?"

Jesus is teaching and his disciples interrupt him. *Your Mom and brothers are here, they want to see you.* Jesus could have said, tell them to wait, tell them I need a few more minutes, tell them I'll meet them downtown at Antica Pizza. But no, Jesus asks a confusing question: *Who is my family?*

It sounds like the wind up to the Abbott and Costello joke: Who's on first? The disciples want to say, *Your family? Your family is the people who are asking to see you, you know, your mom and siblings. They're outside. Waiting. Your. Family.*

But Jesus is asking about wider things, about truer kinship. He's getting at something less obvious, more profound.

Who is my family? To whom do I owe allegiance? For whom am I responsible? Who am I related to, and by whose blood?

* * *

On March 19th 1978, William Least Heat Moon got into his half-ton Ford van, and began driving circles around the United States. His idea of what family was and what family meant had been shattered. His marriage had just ended. So much for the 'nuclear family' he had been building. His college teaching job had just come to an end, given lower enrollment. So much for the colleagues he once counted as 'family' at the university.

This man who had emerged from a lineage that was Irish, English, and Osage Indian got into his van and went off to find America.^[1]Least Heat Moon chose not to travel interstates, but only the highways marked by blue lines on his folded map—hence the name of his book, which came four long years later, *Blue Highways*.

Maybe the road could provide a therapy through observation of the ordinary and obvious, a means whereby the outer eye opens an inner one. STOP, LOOK, LISTEN, the old railroad crossing signs warned. Whitman calls it "the profound lesson of reception."

His *profound lesson of reception* lasted three months and 14,000 miles. On the road he met folk he might now rightly call his family, the likes of Claud Tyler in Dime Box, Texas, and Tom West in Cape Porpoise, Maine.

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The question is, who is your family? Does “family” mean your nuclear family, your church family, the booster club of your favorite team, distant second-cousins five- and six-times removed, your best friends that you love, your siblings with whom you’re still working out all those treasons from childhood?

Jesus, they’re waiting. Your mother and brothers are standing outside. Your family. They’ve come for you.

Raise your hand if you know Ted Lasso. Ted Lasso is the coach of an English soccer team. The first season of this comedy television show can be found on Apple TV and other places. Lasso’s team loses an important game, a game they almost won, but they lost, lost in the last seconds. In the locker room, the team is bummed.

“There’s something worse than feeling sad,” he said. “It’s feeling sad all alone.”

He asks the team to look up. Look around. They see each other in their pain, face to face, grass-stained, sweaty, tired bodies. They see their fellow players, managers, coaches, staff, owner in their sadness. They look around. Coach Lasso hasn’t built a team. He’d cobbled together a family.

Jesus, they’re waiting. Your mother and brothers are standing outside. Your family. They’ve come for you.

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This text invites us to think: What would Jesus think about the likes of Claud Tyler in Dime Box, Texas, and Tom West in Cape Porpoise, Maine? He might ask: Do you seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God? If you do, you are my brothers. And all of you starters and riders of the bench on Ted Lasso’s soccer team: Are you perplexed and gladdened by the mystery of God’s love? If so, you are my brothers and sisters. Lift up your eyes. Take note of the ordinary and obvious. Behold: my family.

Jesus is turning things upside down. Again. He can’t even allow a small interruption without calling it into question. *My family?*

Sure, Jesus came from a family. A genealogy. A family line-up. (A genealogy is mentioned in Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark’s gospel.) *A mother and brothers* are mentioned in our passage today. But that’s not his only family. For Jesus, the idea of family is broader than the people you grew up with. Family is more than blood. DNA is not the only thing that twists and twines us together.

My family? Look around you. These are my peeps. This, also, is my family.

We watch Jesus at work in Mark's gospel, and we know that Jesus is related to the wanderers, to all those who answer God's call, and to all those willing to go anywhere to be blessings to all people. To travel with Jesus is to widen—always to widen—the circle of family.

If you try to love God as I try to love God, then we're related.

If you try to serve God as I try to serve God, then we're kin.

The writer of John's First letter would later say, "See what love the father has for us, that we should be called children of God? And so we are."

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When I was a brand-new pastor in Arkansas, we ran an afterschool program on Wednesdays for our elementary school kids. We devoured Brenda Love's cheese sandwiches, and children floated like kites in the playground by the wide river. Every week in the sanctuary we'd pray. And every week we'd sing, with great reverence, with great joy and abandon and faith, orange Kool-Aid ringing glad lips:

*We are the family of God.
YES! We are the family of God.
And God's brought us together
to be one in him,
that we might bring light to the world!*

Jesus, they're waiting. Your mother and brothers are standing outside. Your family. They've come for you.

And they are sweaty and sad and alone. Some have been living on the bench by Westside Park. They're wearing smiles, they're older, wiser. They're from the University and from out of town, from the high-born and the unknown. They are struggling to know who they are, who God made them to be. They are the doubters, the dancers, the belligerent teens and giddy children. They're guilty of a few felonies for which they've been convicted, and a few more for which they haven't. They doubt themselves. They pray long, silent prayers. They want to do and be better. They feeling inadequate, despite their trophies and degrees. They are poets. They are dreamers. They ponder deep, deep mystery. They don't pretend to have the answers. And they are singing. All of them are singing, singing, singing—proclaiming that we are the family of God. Yes, we are the family of God.

Why? Why are we God's family? Because our brother Jesus looks at us and says so—by the grace of God.

AMEN.

^[1] (This sounds like a great line from Paul Simon's anthem, "American Tune," a song covered nicely by both the Chicago-born Kurt Elling, and Nashville royalty Darrell Scott.)