

Bible Study

For small group discussion or personal journaling

Mark 3:20-35

also references 6/06/21 sermon by Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas

“Who Is in the Family?”

Day 1. Parallel Structure. Read Mark 3:19b-35.

Scholar Judith Hoch Wray notes the importance of the parallel (chiastic) structure of the passage:

3:19b-20 Setting: Jesus at home/house, great crowds, cannot eat bread.

A 3:21 Jesus' family

B 3:22 Jesus accused of being possessed by Beelzebul

C 3:23-27 Parables: A house divided; the strong man's house

B' 3:28-30 Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

A' 3:31-35 Jesus' family

- Share or journal about this structure and the parallels.
- What, if anything, strikes you in terms of meaning or symbolism?

Day 2. The Two Parables. (vv. 23-27).

Section C is at the heart of the reading; it contains the two parables: “A House Divided” and “The Strong Man's House.” Note that “home” or “house” is a central theme of the passage, as is “family.” (Read Mark 2:1-12 for another story that mentions “home” a lot).

Judith Hoch Wray once again notes a parallel/chiastic structure within Mark 3:23-25:

C How can Satan cast out Satan?

c a kingdom divided cannot stand

c' a house divided cannot stand

C' Satan divided cannot stand

- What is Jesus accused of in v. 22?
- Share or journal about how Jesus' parable, "A House Divided" (vv. 23-25), challenges the accusation.
- Read Mark 1:7. Who is the strong man (3:27)?
- Share or journal about him in light of John the Baptist's description of "one who is more powerful."
- Who is John the Baptist talking about?
- Who is "stronger" – the one who is more powerful (1:7) or the strong man (3:27)?

Reflect/discuss/journal.

Day 3. Forgiveness. (vv. 28-30).

Looking back at Hoch Wray's structure (see section 1), we note that vv. 28-30 parallel v. 22.

B and B'. In v. 28, "people" is better translated as "children of humanity." Jesus is giving an all-inclusive forgiveness to those who accept him; but to those who reject him – for example, his accusers in v. 22 – they "can never have forgiveness" (v. 29).

- Read Matthew 12:22-32. Note how Matthew expands on and interprets Mark's pronouncement. Remember, too, that Mark and Matthew both write for a church that is oppressed by both religious and governmental authorities.
- Share or journal thoughts, concerns and questions about these difficult verses, keeping in mind the emphasis in v. 28 on God's all-inclusive forgiveness.

Day 4. Difference of Opinion.

Difference of opinion:

"That's how church splits happen. That's how new denominations get formed.

And sometimes, that's how folks end up leaving the church altogether, using the 'divisiveness' and the 'hypocrisy' of 'those Christians' as a reason or an excuse."
(Sharon Snapp-Kolas)

- Share or journal thoughts about this quote from Sunday's sermon, in connection with your study of this week's gospel reading from Mark. You may also want to listen again to the story at the beginning of the sermon – you can find it on the church website or Facebook page.

Going deeper... "Who is my mother? Who is my brother?". (vv. 31-35).

"Who is my mother? Who is my brother?"

"All those who gather round Jesus Christ.
Spirit-blown people, born from the Gospel,
sit at the table, round Jesus Christ."

(The Faith We Sing, #2225)

Share or journal about these words, phrases & images, inspired by Mark 3:20-35. After studying this reading, how would you answer these questions:

- Who is my mother?
- Who is my brother?
- What does it mean to you to be a part of "those who gather round Jesus Christ?"
- What does it mean to you to be Spirit-blown? born from the Gospel?
- What does it mean to you, to "sit at the table, round Jesus Christ?"
- Remember, also, the parallel with 3:21 -- A and A'. Who is "outside" the house/the family? Who is "inside?"
- Share or journal, in closing, about 3:35 as Jesus' definition of an insider.