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Psalm 37:1-11

Mark 3:20-26 & 30-34

One aspect of this series on Jesus I'm enjoying, is letting Jesus really be the person scripture presents him to be.

More colourful, more controversial, more real.

Reflecting back over my life and many sermons, the evangelical church has had a tendency to smooth out the bumps when it comes to Jesus. To re-interpret his words and actions and make something that looks argumentative, controversial, angry or grumpy into something more spiritual and carefully thought out. What are we afraid of? Let's see him clearly.

Today we get a glimpse of a period of time when Jesus was at odds with his family. They thought he was mad.

We all know the saying don't we, you can choose your friends but you can't choose your family.

I remember my parent's attitude towards Uncle Gordon. He was actually my mother's cousin and ...wait for it....he was an artist.

I know – please don't think any the less of me.

Because I only have the information they supplied when I was a child, I can't really make an adult informed decision as to why he was the odd one out in the family – even back then I could work out he was more colourful and eccentric.

But there is nothing quite so complicated as family relationships and families full stop. If you think yours is a complicated set of relationships, I can re-assure you that that is normal!

I was chatting about a family I'd come across to a friend – various members of the family were estranged from one another.

Out the blue this friend mentioned his brother who I had never heard of who had disappeared from the family a long time ago. It would appear that this brother never felt the bonds of family in the way most of us would like to and so drifted away...quite purposely in some senses.

Families are complicated and even as I speak I know it's the same for you too. Let gentleness be evident here today.

In Jesus timeline his ministry is now well established. The disciples have been appointed the ministry of preaching and teaching and healing is very well known. Crowds follow Jesus, people seek him out, in particular all the sick, the lame, the demon possessed, the mentally ill (who I am sure were categorised as demon possessed - just an opinion I have).

On this particular occasion it's got out of hand. Jesus and his disciples were in a house to have a meal, but such was the press of the crowd and the number of people pressing in, Jesus and his disciples couldn't even eat. It sounds very chaotic.

I was trying to think of a similar scene here and it reminded me of the primary school carol service. The place is heaving with people and it was too many to manage comfortably. Anyone arriving late had to squeeze in through the mass of people at the back and try and find a space. I imagine it was something like that.

It's into this chaotic situation Mary and Jesus brothers arrive to "take charge of him" for they said "he is out of his mind". They thought he was mad.

I wonder what led them to that conclusion?

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Perhaps the younger brothers still thought that Jesus was a local village carpenter with ideas well above his station. This preaching and teaching was getting out of hand, the whole area was talking about him and flocking to him.

Perhaps the time Jesus returned to Nazareth – which was awkward enough for Jesus – had left the whole village giving the family a hard time?

Perhaps it was his open challenge to the Synagogue system, the Jewish leaders and the scribes and Pharisees. Your thoughts are as good as mine...we can't be sure...but when Mark came to write his gospel either Mary or James the brother of Jesus, or St. Peter to whom Mark was close, told him the story of how they felt at that early stage.

Let's look at this through the family's eyes. Remember that James (Jesus' brother) became the leader of the church in Jerusalem and Mary always held a special place in the church. Imagine them telling Mark the story.

"Do you remember the time we thought Jesus had gone mad? He was still in Galilee and he'd gone to that fellows' house for a meal with Peter and John and all they others – what was that blokes name? Can't remember. Anyway, we got there and you couldn't get near the place for the crowd.

Inside, Jesus was having a right argument with some law teachers. They accused him of being possessed, he was ridiculing their stupidity, they said he had an evil spirit, he was starting to lose his cool with them.

Then do you remember what he said?

The guy that owned the place – what was his name? – he said, your mother and brothers are outside and they are looking for you.

And Jesus said "Who are my mothers and brothers?" and he looked around at that rag tag bunch of people – the tax collectors and prostitutes and the frankly weird, the people he'd been healing and the poorest of the poor and he said

Here are my mother and brothers.

Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.

(Mark asks a question)

How did that make you feel?

(Mary answers.)

Forlorn. Dismissed. Unwanted.

(James answers)

I was even more convinced he was mad...but then back then I hadn't really grasped who HE was, and what he meant.

What does he mean???

The church is Jesus family but it's a unique family in that anyone can choose to belong. And Jesus is deliberately referring to the people who were sick and lame and poor and demon possessed and outcasts and disadvantaged and overlooked. And then of course he mixed with the wealthy, the business types, the successful and the well to do – like the carpenter whose house he was in (what was his name? Can't remember). Jesus is deliberately calling all of the community HIS family and what qualifies you if that you do the will of the Father. And the first thing the Father wants is for you to believe in the Son.

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However large we become in number, however diverse and varied we might be...from those who really aren't sure what they believe and those who are sure they know what they know...we are family.

And at its best family are connected. We know where each other are and how each other are. We know when someone needs solitude and when they need company. We weep when they weep and party when they party. Church is like that.

Yesterday we used that "find friends" thing on the mobile and our son and his wife were in Ikea in Sheffield – a few texts went back and forth about that.

Our youngest caught the 4:40pm flight to New York for a week viewing galleries and she texted from the plane – a family in-joke about the mother in Home Alone.

Our other daughter texted to admit she still has the keys for the last Vicarage and what should she do?

We are connected.

People can choose to drift away from their church family just as they do from their own family...but the church family does not deliberately exclude or ostracise or discard. No-one is disposable and at our best we are connected. We can't be connected to everybody, but we can be connected to some.

And if someone is very different – let's call them a bit of an Uncle Gordon – we work harder to connect and understand and make room at the table.

Our church family becomes very dear to us and that CAN be threatening to our own family, but the purpose is that we live out in the connected relationships with this wide disparate group of church family the command "love each other". At our best – we

demonstrate the kingdom of God simply through our relationships and connectedness. The family we chose and who welcomed us.