

BIBLE READING: Mark 3:20-35

SERMON

I haven't got anything very technical to say today - there are no hidden truths to reveal, no unusual words in Greek that mean more than can be expressed in plain English. No - in fact - what I've got to say is simple - Jesus says...

"Whoever does what God wants them to do, is my brother, my sister, my mother."

So, we too can be the brothers and sisters of Jesus when we do what God wants.

How can we do this? - Jesus said...

"Unless we follow Him we will never enter the Kingdom of God."

Seems simple doesn't it? Follow Jesus and Obey God's will and we are recognised as family by Jesus! Surely this is good news!

There are a few flies in the ointment. It seems Jesus' brothers and sisters by blood weren't so excited by this good news! In fact they thought Jesus was going crazy, and came to take him home. They had every earthly reason to suspect Jesus' sanity. Just two years previously he had given up a good, secure job - being a carpenter was a skilled occupation - always in demand - just like plumbers and accountants today! He left his home in Nazareth where he had lived with his family for well over fifteen years and became a dole bludger. Not that they had midlife crises in those days, but it sure must have seemed like that to his family, friends and neighbours.

What would ever possess someone to give up the security of a steady income and a secure, pleasant place to eat and sleep? In fact, Jesus is accused of being possessed by Beelzebul (the devil) - by some teachers of the law! Which leads me to think of another reason why his family might have wanted to put him away. Jesus certainly had not read the book - *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. It seems he just didn't know when to stop his attacks against the religious and political establishment of his day. He ignored the authority of the Jewish leaders and accused them of hypocrisy. Anyone with sense knew you just didn't do things like that hope to get away with it. The Jewish leaders were experts in political manipulation and were willing to allow the end to justify the means: if for the sake of stability and security, they needed to lie and bribe and finally murder, then that was what it took to make sure that the boat wasn't rocked. Jesus, instead of getting these power brokers on side, spoke out against them - sheer madness - utter folly - unless he was taken in hand, then it was inevitable he would be taken care of - and his fall could possibly drag down his family also.

Then there was that bunch of misfits and dregs of society he hung around with - tax collectors, revolutionaries, the scum and rejects of normal society. The only sane one of them was Judas, who seemed to have his head screwed on right! Hot heads and thick heads, and Jesus travelled around in their company - certainly not the action of a sane man! Or so thought some in his family - certainly the teachers of the law saw it that way. So his family come to take him home and maybe help him come to his senses. Jesus certainly was beside himself in his desire to do the will of his Father - preaching and healing - he wanted to share with everyone the good news of the Kingdom - that God can make us new again - that through God's Spirit we can come to know and experience the love and grace and peace of God.

You see Jesus knew some things his family apparently did not. That it is only when we are willing to throw away our lives for God's sake that we find life and experience it to the fullest. By the way he lived and died, which he would have all who follow him copy, he showed that God becomes real only when a person is willing to throw away their security. Risk taking is to be a normal part of Christian living. He threw away not only security but safety - he didn't hedge his bets - he placed his life on the line, not concerned for the risks, not willing to let

the threat of failure worry him. He knew long before his last journey to Jerusalem that he was going to die, and certainly not of old age!

He also showed us through his life, not to be worried about what others think about us. He didn't much care what people said about him, the only person he wanted to please was his Father - and to achieve this goal, he went about his work wholeheartedly - beside himself - as it were, doing the things of God.

This leaves us with the need to decide how people will see us - and whether we will worry about their opinions. I have often come across members of the churches I have ministered in who have felt inadequate, or worried about what others might say or do if they shared with them about what it means for them to be Christians. The will of God for the followers of Jesus is to tell the world the good news of his love and forgiveness. While we sit in our homes, secure and comfortable, no-one will hear the good news. While we stay safe - we will never, ever come near people to whom God has a special affection - the poor and destitute. H.G.Wells said that "the voice of [a person's] neighbour is louder than the voice of God." While we hide, while we think of excuses, while we worry about our reputation, the world waits to hear the good news. Its about time to start taking a few risks in our living - to step out in faith, no matter where it may take us.

Here is an excerpt from John Bunyan's diary. John Bunyan was arrested and imprisoned twice for his religious convictions. When in prison he wrote "A Pilgrim's Progress." Here is part of his reflection of his experience in prison... *"My imprisonment might end on the gallows for ought that I could tell. Methought I was ashamed to die with a pale face and tottering knees for such a cause as this. Wherefore, thought I, I am for going on and venturing my eternal state with Christ whether I have comfort here or no; if God doth not come in, thought I, I will leap of the ladder even blindfold into eternity, sink or swim, come heaven, come hell; Lord Jesus if thou wilt catch me, do: if not, I will venture in thy name."* That is what Jesus was willing to do!

If we would be his brothers and sisters, - we must be willing to take risks and be willing to face the consequences. I am sure you can think of things in your lives or relationships with others that you just put up with, unwilling to risk the chance of failure, embarrassment or ridicule. Remember John Bunyan - frightened of dying - not sure where he would end up - finally deciding to risk all for the sake of his Lord, Master, Friend and Brother Jesus. Will Jesus name us brother or sister? or do we find more in common with his family who stood outside and called for him to come out and stop making a fool of himself? Let us take a risk for Jesus' sake and try to live life his way - what have we got to lose, that we will not lose in dying anyway?

Risking Much

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.

To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.

To reach out for another is to risk involvement.

To expose feelings is to risk exposing our true self.

To place your ideas, your dreams, before the crowd is to risk loss.

To love is to risk not being loved in return.

To live is to risk dying.

To hope is to risk despair.

To try at all is to risk failure.

But risk we must, because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing. The man, the woman, who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.