

In the name of God, who through the Word and in the Spirit creates, redeems, and sanctifies. Amen.

We now find ourselves back in what we call Ordinary Time. Ordinary can mean two things: it can mean common or usual; but when we're talking about the church year, it means that we're back in a time where our readings aren't geared toward a season. Advent readings are all about the season of anticipation; in Christmas and Epiphany we think about celebration; Lent is about reflection; Easter is about new life and eternal joy. Ordinary Time means we are following scripture readings in their appointed order; we read the origin stories recorded in the Hebrew Bible, and the wisdom of its prophets; we'll read letters written to the early church communities to answer their questions and address their struggles to become what God envisioned for them. And we're back into Mark's account of the life and ministry of Jesus.

In today's Gospel, the crowd in Galilee has found that Jesus is anything but common or usual; what he has been doing and teaching is so remarkable that the people gather around him and his disciples in such numbers that they can't even eat. Experts in Hebrew scripture have come all the way

from Jerusalem to try to figure out what is behind the actions of this common man from the unremarkable town of Nazareth. Along with the attention Jesus has drawn to himself from the crowds and the scribes, we also see something else going on: The very human interaction of a family worried about its child, its brother. It seems that the people who knew Jesus' family were saying that Jesus was out of his mind; after all, why would a skilled labourer's son believe he was sent by God to proclaim the coming of God's kingdom? Jesus has declared himself able to forgive sins; he had cast out demons, healed the paralysed, and broken bread with tax collectors and other undesirables. Jesus is not doing what the son of a skilled labourer should do: learn his father's trade and prepare to have a family and lead his own household.

Jesus, as the eldest son of Mary and Joseph, is not doing what he should to take care of them in their old age; he is not doing what he should to protect his sisters and see that they marry well into other respectable households; he is not teaching his younger brothers the skills that he has learned from their father so that they can support their own families when the time comes. Jesus is throwing all of that out the window and telling this crowd that there is such a thing as the faith family; a family who are as

beloved of God as Jesus is because they, like Jesus, seek first and foremost to do the will of God.

For the crowd listening, this teaching must have sounded both strange and wonderfully welcoming. Such an expansive and inclusive idea of family would have also implied that the kind of care and support that Jesus should have shown to his biological family was extended to them. But I do wonder what this teaching would have sounded like to Jesus' mother, brothers and sisters; I can't help but think it felt as if they were losing Jesus' love for them; as if they were being callously set aside in favour of perfect strangers. Jesus' earthly family were trying to protect him, to save Jesus from himself; they care what others think about him because it reflects badly on them; but I also think they love this son and brother of theirs and understand the danger he has put himself in. Just prior to this episode we read today, Mark tells us that there are already people conspiring against Jesus to destroy him. Jesus' mother and sisters and brothers would have to wonder if the emotional turmoil, and fear, and worry they feel could really have anything to do with the kingdom of God. And so they try to restrain Jesus, to pull him back into the small, closed, caring circle of his earthly family.

We know that God's love shown through Jesus is vast; it is wide enough and deep enough to embrace the entire human family. But like Jesus' mother and sisters and brothers, in times of real fear and anguish and worry, we don't always feel that there is love enough. When we ourselves find life precarious and uncertain, or the wellbeing of someone we care for is in jeopardy and we are helpless to intervene, God's love can seem distant, God's love can seem to set us aside in favor of purposes we cannot understand. We can feel like we are on the outer edge of a crowd and Jesus is out of our reach.

Jesus looks at this crowd and he realizes that they will need more than just the families they were born into. Those small, closed circles can be beautiful, and a refuge, and a source of strength; but people of faith also need families held together by their love of God and their desire to do God's will. Like the families they were born into, these disciples will protect each other, misunderstand each other, fear for each other, care for each other, be frustrated by each other, absolutely adore each other and, from time to time, be utterly fed up with each other. But if they seek first and foremost to do the will of God, and to bring about God's holy reign, they will

with God's grace do the hard work of loving each other. They will be family. And the love that they have received from God will be too much to keep among themselves; it will spread far and wide, just as the good news of Jesus' work spread throughout Galilee and beyond.

Leo Tolstoy once said that there will be no human brotherhood until we learn to be brother to everyone. Putting aside Tolstoy's masculine take on it, Jesus is telling his disciples that there will only be a faith family when we learn to be brother and sister to everyone. It is one of the daily, unspectacular tasks of being a believer. When we learn to be brother and sister to everyone, the love that God shows through us can reach into those fearful, anguished and uncertain times in our lives and give us family when we need it. The care and protection and support that Jesus the Son was expected to give his family, we can give to one another. It is a radical rethinking for the people of Jesus' time who would have framed their interactions in terms of the extended family and clan; it is certainly a radical rethinking for us who are accustomed to individualism, barely moving beyond our immediate family, and sometimes not even moving beyond our selves.

Jesus looks at us and says, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” What an incredible gift, to be Jesus’ human family! What an incredible challenge to be Jesus’ human family! Think of the care and concern we are expected to have for those nearest to us, and extending that same kind of care and concern to all of those working to do the will of God - to bring about a holy reign of peace and justice ruled by the law of love. Think of the support we can give to one another as we grow beyond our imperfections to allow each of us to be our better selves. It is a beautiful, grace-filled, and difficult vision; but it is a vision that God trusts us to make real. Day by day, in ordinary and extraordinary ways, may we learn to be sister and brother to everyone; and day by day, may we all uphold and affirm one another, challenging each other to be our better selves, so that we, God’s beloved human family, may grow and flourish and repair this broken world. Amen.