

June 10, 2018 Third Sunday after Pentecost
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GOSPEL

Mark 3:20-35

The holy gospel according to Saint Mark, the third chapter.

Glory to , O Lord.

[Jesus went home;] ²⁰and the crowd came together again, so that [Jesus and the disciples] could not even eat. ²¹When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” ²²And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” ²³And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”—³⁰for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

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 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.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

This week I’ve found myself thinking about who we look up to...and why. A fitting thing to consider at the end of a school year and at a transition point in many people’s lives, perhaps. What makes certain people our role models?

I think there are different kinds of people we look up to. There are those people who seem farther than us along a road we hope to travel. Wise ones...better at doing all the things we want to be good at doing. One online meme says it this way... “[There is] that horrifying moment when you’re looking for an adult, then realize you’re an adult. So you look for an older adult...someone successfully adulting...an adultier adult.” I know I still feel that way sometimes...at my own stage of adulting...and I am beginning to suspect that it might never go away (which, I’ll be honest, makes it feel like I was lied to early in life when people seemed to imply that some magic day I would be grown up and not longer have strong urges to jump in big puddles and that I would magically obtain an understanding what “escrow” means...and how to save money for retirement)...Maybe some of the people I think of as adultier adults can confirm whether or not that feeling of pretending to be an adult when you don’t know how to be one ever goes away. For my part, I’m still waiting.

There is another type of person we look up to, I think...and that is the person in whose presence you feel like you can be fully yourself...adulty or not...and it feels like being fully yourself is ok. And they help you do that because they seem that way, too.

I rather imagine that Jesus was more the latter than the former. I don’t know how adulty of an adult he ever was. But I think certain people felt like they could be honest and vulnerable and real with him...not necessarily because it would be easy to admit to failures or not understanding things...but because he would help them find the next step...help them find enough peace in the moment to move into the next...and because Jesus would also have a knack for showing you how the truth was more important than looking like you had your act together for all the other people pretending to be adults in the world.

All this matters this week because I think the news in the world has collided very strongly with what we need from God to get through it. This week that includes the very difficult topic of suicide...as two beloved public figures ended their own lives in the past few days – designer Kate Spade and chef and storyteller Anthony Bourdain.

If this is a topic that is hard for you and you need a break from this space and

conversation, you can take care of yourself without judgment. And if this topic is close to your life, I pray that the words Jesus has for us today will offer us the freedom to be our true and vulnerable selves...and feel stronger for what lies ahead on our journeys. I pray for that, because Jesus' words today have often been used for exactly the opposite purpose, and that is a wrong for which the church needs to answer.

The cryptic words Jesus speaks today about eternal sin...about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit...whatever that really is...being somehow unforgiveable...have been so weaponized in our world. The church has used this saying of Jesus...and basically shoe-horned in any sin we want to call the worst one...by saying it is a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit...even though Scripture shows us the depth and breadth of human sinfulness...and doesn't ever seem to come upon a sinner that God is not able to redeem. That the church would ever have decided suicide was such a sin speaks more about our fears than God's ability to forgive...and I have no doubt in my mind that God does not eternally condemn a beloved child of his because an illness makes them unable to find joy and the will to live. If anything is a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit...it is everything the church has done to deepen the shame and guilt of those who live with suicidal thoughts or actions, and those left behind when a loved one dies this way...

If you suffer from depression, trauma, or anything that isolates you from hope and joy, hear this, God loves you. God's heart breaks when yours is broken or numb. And you are loved here in this world. Please try to stay...please find someone in this community, or someone else you trust, if you can...and ask them to stay with you. And may any of us who can, find the courage to reach out and ask the questions – “Are you ok? Are you thinking about hurting yourself? Can I stay with you? Can we look for help together?” ...Even as we also know that sometimes we cannot see the illness or pain that takes people from us...and God wants us to let him take the burdens of guilt we carry off of our hearts.

Today Jesus is trying to show his critics and detractors that his connection to God and the Holy Spirit can be seen...because what his life shows is love and the power to give life. He casts out demons; he doesn't feed them. He reaches out in love, not judgment. He sees all people as his family, not just his own

small tribe. He reaches out to those who need him. That is how they can trust that he comes from God, even though they are looking for ways to deny it.

How Jesus speaks of family is also one of the hard and beautiful teachings of Jesus that proclaims today...Perhaps we remember the first time we heard about that strange scene of Jesus seeming to ignore or even reject his family who has come out with the crowds to find him. Perhaps this let some of us feel vindicated in youthful rebellions...or maybe we felt grateful that Jesus seemed to be giving us permission to walk away from family relationships that had wounded us...In addition to that that, though, I think Jesus is showing us, again, that we are *all* family...and that we may find the family we need beyond the boundaries where we've been taught to look.

In fact, when we truly perceive the world as Jesus does, we can realize that our destiny as a human family truly is woven together in one fabric (as Rev. Dr. King often preached)...and that to resort to tribalism and isolation is both perfectly in keeping with human nature...and also contrary to the vision of the kingdom of God. Or as a friend online put it this week, "There is no such thing as other people's children."

One person who seemed to live with a knowledge of our shared kinship across many beautiful differences, was, in fact, Anthony Bourdain. From those who knew him...he was one of those people you look up to...maybe not for being the adultiest adult...but because he knew how to love differences, vulnerability, intimacy, and he loved to appreciate the beauty of others and help us connect to each other through food. Which...honestly...is one of the primary actions given to Christ's church...to host a meal where we are all fed...where we are all family...where we all are who God made us to be in our stunning and beautiful variety.

So many of us are looking for the person who will help us understand a world that we don't...I think we all feel like frauds and failures and imposters at times...even those who are most often looked up to this way.

One of my favorite and most comforting stories about that feeling of being an imposter, a fake grown-up, and unqualified comes from author Neil Gaiman...in this story he wrote on his blog:

“Some years ago, I was...invited to a gathering of great and good people: artists and scientists, writers and discoverers of things. And I felt that at any moment they would realize that I didn’t qualify to be there, among these people who had really done things...I was standing at the back of the hall...and I started talking to a very nice, polite, elderly gentleman about several things, including our shared first name. And then he pointed to the hall of people, and said words to the effect of, ‘I just look at all these people, and I think, what the heck am I doing here? They’ve made amazing things. I just went where I was sent.’

And I said, ‘Yes. But you *were* the first man on the moon. I think that counts for something.’

And I felt a bit better. Because if Neil Armstrong felt like an imposter, maybe *everyone* did. Maybe there weren’t any grown-ups, only people who had worked hard and also got lucky and were slightly out of their depth, all of us doing the best job we could, which is all we can really hope for.”

(<https://qz.com/984070/neil-gaiman-has-the-perfect-anecdote-for-anyone-with-impostors-syndrome/>)

Maybe we are all looking for the person or the place where it’s ok to not be a real grown-up or have our act together or be happy and excited about life. With every fiber of my being, I pray that this is a place like that for anyone who needs it, where the bread we break...and the love we share...will bring us into the presence of Jesus...the one who shows us who we have been created to be – beloved children, made in the image of God.

May it be so. Amen.