

Cool Your Jets, Jesus!

[Text - Mark 3:20-35]

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In the first three Chapters of Mark's Gospel, Jesus' ministry is sailing along smoothly. He's preaching and teaching about the Divine Realm which is spreading throughout the land. And he backs-up his *words* with *action*: healing people of various diseases; freeing them from oppressive spirits; and demonstrating the inclusive nature of that Divine Realm, through his gracious welcome to all. But all of a sudden, things start to get a little crazy. Jesus' family thinks that *he's* going crazy, and try to restrain him! Then, the religious leaders from Jerusalem add fuel to the fire, by claiming, "He has Beelzebul; and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons!"

That's an extremely inflammatory charge! And while Jesus might expect such harsh criticism from the religious authorities who see him as a threat, it's a lot more troubling that his own family doesn't understand the good that he's doing. It's hard to tell whether their attempt to restrain him stems from a genuine concern for him, or from a sense of embarrassment. Regardless, it's obvious that Jesus' family, like his religious adversaries, really want him to back-off! The question, is "*why?*" It's not like he's deliberately causing harm. In fact, he's doing just the opposite. He's helping people and healing them - restoring their bodies, minds, and spirits - so they can lead healthy and fulfilling lives. So why this vicious verbal attack, and this attempt to physically restrain him? I think there are three primary reasons for this; and that they are particularly relevant to some issues you and I face in today's society.

The first, is that Jesus truly *is* stirring things up! He may not be intentionally causing trouble, but he is relentlessly challenging the status quo. He is helping people who others see only as being "sick" or "invalid" - those no longer "valid" or of "value" to their communities. [Like those "lucky" people today, who get their medical care for free at the emergency room. That's right! According to a recent survey by the

Pew Research Center, 57% of our country's wealthiest citizens believe that "The poor have it easy, because they can get government benefits without doing anything." Those lucky stiffs!] Jesus is showing compassion for those kind of "fortunate" people on the fringes of society! He is graciously welcoming and advocating for those who others simply lump together, and summarily condemn. [Like all those cheating food stamp recipients, and all those lazy people on unemployment.] Jesus is welcoming, helping and uplifting these pathetic poor people - which really angers many of his super-religious contemporaries. Like some self-righteous individuals today, these people are highly invested in labeling others as being unfit for the Divine Realm, because it helps them feel morally and spiritually superior. And Jesus is exposing their hypocrisy!

The second reason Jesus is seen as a dangerous troublemaker, is because he's offering genuine hope to people who are down-and-out. Hope that they, and their problems, truly matter to the Holy One. Hope that their lives might actually improve! Hope that there really is a Divine Desire and Power to counterbalance Life's inequities and injustices. And this Spirit of Hope that Jesus is stirring-up in society's downtrodden, is starting to make society's elite extremely nervous! It can be quite distressing for people who are used to controlling the vast majority of a community's power and wealth, to see the people at the bottom begin to question why they must stay there. And Jesus' progressive way of providing spiritual, physical, and mental healthcare to those who most desperately need it, begins to level the playing field in a way that deeply disturbs the "acceptable" status quo.

The Good News that Jesus proclaims to the poor and disenfranchised *can* be seen as a threat, particularly when it causes us to question the comfortable lives to which we have become accustomed. So while those who are down-and-out eagerly embrace Jesus and his message of hope, those who are already living the good life can find this extremely unsettling. This is why they try to discredit Jesus, and to distort his message. Jesus says, "Blessed are the *poor*, for the Divine Realm belongs to them!" Today's televangelist says, "Prosperity and

wealth are the *real* signs of God's favor! And if you want to know how this works, send me \$100 and I'll tell you!"

This leads to the third reason that Jesus is so viciously attacked by those who are entrenched in positions of power. His message and methods are so powerful, and so in-tune with the historic, Prophetic Call for justice and compassion, that his adversaries have become desperate. So they charge that his ability doesn't come from God, but from the devil himself - Beelzebul - the Lord of the Flies! [With a nasty nickname like that, no wonder Satan's so cranky and mean!] Jesus' response to this absurd allegation, is both logical and concise: "A house divided against itself cannot stand. So if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, then he cannot stand!" Jesus then warns his attackers, that when people become so twisted in their thinking, that they see things which are good and pure and wholesome, as being demonically evil, their very soul is in peril. Even the redemptive power of Pure Goodness cannot restore those who absolutely refuse it and reject it.

Jesus clearly will not tolerate people defiling and demonizing his message of Divine Love and Grace, regardless of how uncomfortable that message makes them feel. He knows that the Good News he proclaims, by its nature, is going to shake things up. But he will not allow his adversaries, or even his own family, to subvert or corrupt his gracious and inclusive ministry. And to show how serious he is, Jesus is willing to step-away from his own biological family, and to put-forth a new definition of what a family can be: an extended community, not based on genetic connection, but upon gracious compassion, and a willingness to warmly welcome all!

So...here's how all of this can affect you and me today. As members of Jesus' extended family, you and I have the wonderful opportunity to show, and share that Divinely Inclusive Love with all kinds of people! To let them know that their problems - and their lives - truly matter to the Holy One, and to us.

To give them hope, that there *is* a Divine Desire and Power to counter-balance Life's inequities and injustices.

And most importantly, to be an integral part of that balancing act: To faithfully raise-up the lowly, and to firmly turn-down the lame protests of the "traumatized" wealthy. To not only *believe* Jesus' words "whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sister, you do it unto me" - but to actually *behave* accordingly!

The hard truth is, that sometimes, in order to comfort the afflicted, we have to be willing to afflict the comfortable. Even when it's our own comfort-level that requires readjusting.