

## Don't Get too Comfortable!

[Text - Mark 3:20-35]

Pastor Dave Shackle

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In the first three Chapters of Mark's Gospel, Jesus' ministry is moving along rather 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 people. But suddenly, things start to go off-the-rails. Jesus' family thinks that *he's* gone off-the-rails, and try to restrain him! Then 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 malicious charge! And while Jesus might expect such severe 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 tremendous good that he's doing. Their attempt to restrain him seems to stem from a sense of embarrassment, rather than a genuine concern for his well-being. It's obvious that Jesus' family, like his religious adversaries, really want him to back-off! The question is *why*? He's helping people, not harming them. He's 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; reasons that are relevant to some of the 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's helping people who others see only as being "sick" or "invalid" - no longer "valid" or of "value" to their communities. He is graciously welcoming and advocating for those who others simply lump together, and summarily reject. [Like *all* those Mexican murderers and rapists; or *all* those cheating food stamp recipients.]

Jesus is welcoming, helping and raising-up these hurting and disenfranchised people - which really angers many of his religious contemporaries. These self-righteous individuals are highly invested in labeling others as being completely unfit for the Divine Realm, because it makes them feel morally superior. And Jesus is exposing their blatant 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 distressing for people of privilege, 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' gracious way of providing spiritual, physical, and mental healthcare to those who most desperately need it, begins to level the playing field! So, while those who are down-and-out eagerly embrace Jesus and his message of hope, those who are already living the good life find it extremely unsettling. This is why they try to discredit Jesus, and distort his message.

The third reason that Jesus is so viciously attacked by those who are entrenched in positions of power, is that 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 really desperate. They claim that his ability doesn't come from God, but from the devil - Beelzebul - the Lord of the Flies! [Wow! Talk about a twisted attack!] 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 turned-around in their thinking, that they see things which are good and pure and wholesome, as being demonically evil, their very souls are in peril.

Even the redemptive power of Pure Goodness cannot restore those who absolutely refuse it and completely 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 connections, but upon gracious compassion, and a willingness to warmly welcome all our sisters and brothers.

So...here's how all of this can impact you and me today. As members of Jesus' extended family, you and I have the wonderful opportunity to 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 reject the lame protests of people of privilege today - those who feel so misunderstood and traumatized because of the "burden" of their tremendous wealth and power. You and I are not only called to *believe* Jesus' words, that "whatever you do to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do it unto me" - we are also called to *behave* accordingly!

The 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 needs to be adjusted. Even when it means surrendering our own cultural advantages, so that we can stand in solidarity with our culturally disadvantaged sisters and brothers. I realize that some people might think we've lost our minds, if we willingly give-up our power and prestige for the sake of others. Of course, that's exactly what they thought about Jesus.