

Mark 3:31 Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

³³ "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Dear Friends in Christ,

HOW COULD HE SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

How difficult it must have been. Imagine being a mother and calling up your son one afternoon. You are concerned for your son because you think he is making a big mistake. But your son says, "Mom, I don't have time for this." Sort of like the reading, except that Mary mother of Jesus put a lot more work into it than picking up the phone and hitting speed dial #3. Imagine being in her place. You journey a day and a half, one way, just to see your son and have this talk. But you still don't have the talk, and it hurts, because you didn't drive a day and a half, you walked a day and a half. Have you ever done that? Walked a day and a half just to have a heartfelt talk with someone, and when you get close, only a door and a few people between you and that loved one, within hearing distance of each other except that you don't want to make a scene so you send someone in, and that dearly loved one who grew up in your house and you carried hurriedly one night off to a foreign land called Egypt because you heard the king was going to try to kill your son—that son—the same son you carried sixteen miles 40 days after you had given birth to him, so that he could be presented to the Lord in the temple according to the Law of God—that son—the same son you had taken to the same temple when he was 12 years old to observe the Passover, when that son scared the liver out of you as you started home and realized you couldn't find your boy and thought something dreadful had happened to him and only after you had searched in the scary city of Jerusalem for three days fearing the worst and then at last found him and with tears hugged him so tight he said, "Mom, I can't breathe" and you promised you were never going to let him out of your sight again—that son—the son whom your husband patiently and for years taught the honest trade of carpenter to earn a living, and who you thought would just be a good son living in the same village as you to take care of you in your old age—that son—he knew you were right outside that door and you could overhear him say (always the worst way to hear a negative comment isn't it, when you overhear it) you overheard him say when the crowd told him that his mother was outside, you overheard him say, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Ow! I don't care how Jesus said those words and how much Mary understood about Jesus, understood because she, remember, had been told by both a prophet and an angel that her son would be someone great, great even in the eyes of God—even for a son like that who had great things to accomplish in life, it must have been a wounding arrow. Just as that old man Simeon had said when he looked, with those prophet eyes, like God himself were staring into her soul—because he was through his prophet—it felt just like that time Simeon said, "*And a sword will pierce your own soul too*" it felt just like that when she overheard Jesus say, "***Who are my mother and my brothers?***" (33). If Mary were like all the mothers I know, she was outside the house crying by now.

I. How Could Jesus Say That?

How could Jesus say that! That question, "How could Jesus say that?" is so powerful it threatens to

overwhelm and capsize what God is saying to us, what Jesus said. How could Jesus say that? We need to trust that our sinless Savior needed to say what he said.

But so you don't think I am making excuses for Jesus, there is evidence that Jesus needed to talk that way. The evidence is given a bit earlier in this chapter. Same chapter of the Bible, I read verses 20 and 21: "*Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'*" So you see, there were issues.

We cannot read down into the full intentions of the family. We hear that "*They said, 'He is out of his mind.'*" You can think someone is out of their mind in a lot of different ways. "He's out of his mind" can be said by an angry jealous brother, throwing the coffee cup against the wall, who is sick of hearing about a gifted older brother whom he thinks is delusional. Or "He's out of his mind" can be said by a mother who is sure of her son's gifts and talents, but is worried that he has worked himself too hard. We don't really know the reason they didn't agree with Jesus, we just know that they were there to stop to his work.

So it was that the Savior of the world asked, "***Who are my mother and my brothers?***" He asked not because of who they were, but because of who they had become. Jesus was not rejecting his mother and brothers. He was reprimanding them. They were opposing the work of God.

We do well, at this point, to remember one instance of Jesus' care for his mother. Go forward a couple years to his cross. By the end of Jesus' life, Mary was no longer trying to get in the way of Jesus' ministry, she was accompanying him on his travels. That is how she found herself at her son's execution far from home. While that execution was taking place, you who know the story well know what happened. In his suffering, Jesus committed his mother to the care of one of his followers. Even in his worst suffering, Jesus' mind was on his mother. So we know that Jesus' words in our reading were not a rejection of his mother, but a reprimand because she was getting in the way of his obedience to God. He spoke not to dishonor his mother, but to honor his heavenly Father.

So, on the one hand we know that Jesus had a great concern for his mother. On the other hand, we hear the great wound that Jesus' words inflicted on his mother and brothers. How do you reconcile those two things: his concern and his hurtful words?

To people who are human, there is no mystery. The answer is love. Only love can allow someone to risk losing a precious relationship for a higher good. Jesus loved his mother and brothers, and that is why spoke in this way.

Which is the reason, when we want an honest opinion, we go to those who love us most. For anyone else we can never be completely sure they will give us an honest opinion. They might sugar-coat the truth so we don't feel bad. But with those closest to us, we know that they, when asked, will speak the truth in the kindest way possible. As the book of Proverbs says, "*Wounds from a friend can be trusted*" (27:6). So while Jesus' words may have wounded, they could be trusted. Pointing out sin does hurt! But taking them to heart would only bring benefit and blessing.

That is why Jesus asked that difficult question, "***Who are my mother and my brothers?***"

II. How Could My Fellow Christian Say That?

In most ways, I would say it's easier for us to be close to Jesus, than it was for his mother and brothers. Unlike believing in your brother as your Savior, unlike having listen to another sermon from the goody-two-shoes of the house, we have it pretty easy. We know the whole story of Jesus beginning to end. And we have that distance that helps us see his life in perspective.

Indeed, there are those Gospel moments of life when being a Christian is easy. Like when we come forward to receive the Lord's Supper, that special personal reception of the forgiveness of sins. It's

pretty easy being Jesus' brother or sister when we sing a hymn to our God with the great melody and message. At those moments it is very easy to be a Christian, to be caught up in the meaning and the moment.

But not all moments of faith are easy. Some of those moments mirror our text. I am sure that Jesus' brothers, maybe even his mother, thought, "Jesus has no right to talk to me that way." We have been there. Another Christian, maybe even someone very close to us, corrects us. Even if we do not question their love and concern (though we often do), we still chafe. Our heart still wants to shove their words back at them, to make excuses, to point out that person's fault, to deny that there is a problem. Like Adam and Eve, we have a hundred different things we try to do to avoid accepting responsibility for our sins. How much more do we bristle when we are approached by someone not so close to us, someone with whom we disagree about politics, or someone whose faults are apparent! When those people speak words of Christian correction, we think, "Who gave you the right?" May God give us soft hearts.

Let me tell you what I mean by that: Have you ever gone one full month without rain in Kentucky? In the part of Africa where we lived, the most waited for moment of every year is the first rain. For eight months, not a drop of rain falls from the sky. By that time the dirt paths are hard, not quite as hard as concrete, about as hard as asphalt—so hard that when the rain first comes, the rain just runs off the ground. Eventually it begins to sink in. The next morning is magical with the smells, the sights, the air. But the most unexpected thing is what you feel with your feet. The ground that yesterday was as hard as asphalt, is suddenly soft and springy; you can almost bounce off it. It is ready to soak up the next life giving rain. That is what I mean by having a soft heart. Not that you are always on the verge of crying—not that—but having a heart that is always receptive to a word from our Savior, however it may be offered.

Mary must have been crushed by Jesus' words, "Who is my mother?" But she listened and she learned and she followed her son, her Savior to the cross.

If I or another Christian brings a concern that you are not acting like a brother or sister in Christ, please listen. We might speak haltingly, almost awkwardly trying to explain that your ways are not God's ways. When a Christian comes in that way, forgive them for not being more forthright, but it is because they don't want to hurt you, they just want you to listen to your Savior. No true Christian enjoys pointing out another believer's wrongs, but we do so because God has bidden us to do so.

As we listen with soft, pliable hearts to our Lord-- as we crowd around his word to hear the forgiveness of sins-- as we listen to his will for our lives, even when he tells us things we don't want to hear, imagine sitting there in the circle around Jesus, ***"Then [Jesus] looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'"*** Amen.