

‘Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark’

‘Glory to you, O Lord’

‘This is the Gospel of the Lord’

‘Praise to you, O Christ’.

Please take a seat!

I’m Corinne Braid from St Mary’s Church, just down the road in Fetcham and I’m delighted to be lovely Moni’s fellow student. I’d like to thank you for your warm welcome and especially Charleen for allowing me to come and preach as part of my training.

First of all, let’s pray:

Through the written word, and the spoken word, may we hear the living word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

This morning we’re looking at Mark Chapter 3 verses 20-35.

This passage is like a sandwich – a story within a story – a literary technique frequently used in Mark’s Gospel.

The bread of the sandwich is the story of Jesus’ family coming to find him to take him home and the filling is Jesus’ confrontation with the scribes.

What Jesus’ relations and the scribes have in common

what links the two parts of the sandwich these two disparate groups of people is their opposition to Jesus

He is ostracized both by the religious leaders and by his kin.

They fail to recognize who Jesus is

that he's the son of God.

They are outsiders while Jesus' followers are with Jesus and are the insiders.

With Jesus' reaction to his birth family we are seeing a side of Jesus that may make us feel uncomfortable.

And then there's the elephant in the room
or rather in the sandwich

the unforgivable or unpardonable sin
that's a tough one and we'll be looking at that
later.

Back to the bread of the sandwich:

A great friend of mine went to sixth form at a school in Switzerland and one of her classmates was Glen Close, who is now a famous American actress.

Jill says Glen was an unremarkable, rather plain girl and she doesn't even remember her participating in any school drama productions.

If Jill sees Glen in a movie she finds her character unconvincing, implausible.

She can't get away from the image of the rather gauche schoolgirl she used to know
– she can't get to grips with Glen's changed persona.

Similarly, Jesus' family must have found it difficult to see Jesus in this new light.

Now people flock to him, try and get close to him, hang on his every word.

He is being mobbed by crowds wherever he goes.

Jesus is hot news

- he's the man of the moment
- the talk of the town.

He is healing people, teaching, preaching and casting out demons. He's even forgiving sins which was considered blasphemy, for only God can forgive sins.

What does Jesus think he's doing?

Earlier in this chapter we read that the Pharisees were plotting with the Herodians to kill Jesus.

Now his outrageous activities have caught the attention of the religious dignitaries who've come all the way from Jerusalem.

What is going on?

How come all these things are happening to their Jesus

who has grown up within their family and who they have known all his life?

As far as they can see there is only one explanation.

Jesus has lost the plot

he is out of his mind.

To save him

and the family's reputation

they have to come and get him

seize him is how Mark describes it

and take him home to save further

embarrassment and shame on their family.

They can't even get to see Jesus personally

they have to ask somebody to take a message to

him saying that they are outside.

And how does Jesus respond?

He rejects them

he turns his back on them.

He asks, "Who are my mother and brothers?"

These people surrounding me who believe in God and are obedient to him are my family now."

Jesus' words and rejection of his birth family, his kin, are hard for us to hear, as it must have been for them.

And, in our culture, when we're used to families spreading far and wide and people being encouraged to follow their dreams, their own chosen path,

we don't fully grasp how shocking it was for Jesus to reject his own family in this way.

Different generations and extended families stayed close and lived together, often in the same house, and worked together too.

Incidentally Mark's Gospel

which is believed to have been written first, doesn't include the Annunciation,

when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she was to bear God's son

That narrative only appears in Luke's Gospel which was written later.

And now to the sandwich filling.

The teachers of the law, the scribes, the leading Jewish rabbis, come from Jerusalem to investigate what's happening presumably to shut Jesus up and put an end to his ministry.

They accuse Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebub, by the devil, and say this is where his power is coming from. It was demonic power and possession that was enabling Jesus to drive out demons.

They are saying that Jesus is with Satan. The most terrible insult.

And Jesus, as ever, doesn't lose his cool and replies with a riddle.

If a house is divided against itself it cannot stand but is coming to an end.

Satan doesn't want to destroy himself.

He wants to establish and grow his own Kingdom.

1 John 3 verse 8 says

“the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work”.

Jesus and Satan are categorically not on the same side

They are in direct opposition to each other.

Jesus is not doing Satan's work

He is doing God's work and drawing people into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus won his first confrontation with Satan when he resisted the temptations in the desert after his Baptism.

And the struggle is ongoing.

Jesus is invading Satan's kingdom from the outside.

He is breaking into Satan's lair, his house, “binding the strong man, Satan” and plundering his goods.

In other words Jesus is taking back people from Satan, bringing them back into the light.

Jesus commands evil spirits to leave and they do

because they recognize him and his authority.

God is stronger than Satan

and will win the ultimate battle on the cross.

And what about the unforgivable sin?
How is that compatible with all the reassurances
we have about forgiveness of sins and what Jesus
did for us on the cross?
What about all the times Jesus forgave people
their sins
and what about St Paul's justification by faith.
And what about all the bible references,
For example, John 1 verse 9
"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous
to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all
unrighteousness."
And Romans 8 verse 1
"There is therefore now no condemnation for
those who are in Christ Jesus."

We need to look at the context of this passage
and the clue is in verse 30,
"He said this because they were saying "He has
an evil spirit".

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit
which is unforgivable

is denying the power of the Holy Spirit within
Jesus.
This refusal to accept that it is the Spirit of God
within Jesus
and claiming that it is the spirit of Satan is
unforgivable.
The scribes recognize that Jesus must be
drawing on great power to perform exorcisms
but fatally misidentify its source.
Jesus does not behave as they expect a
righteous person to behave and he is not one of
them
he's an outsider.
According to the scribes Jesus associates with
the wrong people, breaks Sabbath laws
and blasphemes by forgiving sins which only God
can do.
So they commit the greatest blasphemy of all
they mistake the Holy Spirit for Satan.
It's as if they are denying the very existence of
God's Holy Spirit.

I've heard it said that if you're worried about
committing this unforgivable sin against the Holy

Spirit, don't worry, because you haven't!
Because you're conscious of it and worried about
it you haven't done it – so don't worry!

How does this passage relate to us, in our culture.
I think the two parts of the sandwich
the bread and the filling
show us that being a disciple of Jesus demands
whole-hearted commitment, and may come at a
cost.

There may be people,
even those close to us,
as Jesus family were close to him,
who challenge us for having faith in our Lord
Jesus.

“You don't believe all that, do you?”

And we must be brave to admit that, yes, we do
we are followers of Jesus
we are Christians.

We have to be bold to stand up and, if necessary,
go against the crowd.

But the Holy Spirit is always there to help us.

The Holy Spirit is also there to help us recognise
and acknowledge our sins so we can ask for
God's forgiveness, of which we are assured.
However, if we continually ignore those nudges,
those little whispers,
those little pricks on our conscience
when the Holy Spirit is trying to draw our
attention to something in our life we need to
address
and for which we need to ask God's forgiveness,
our heart can become hardened.

As Stephen says to the Pharisees in Acts 7 verse
51

“You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your
fathers did, so do you”.

So the unpardonable sin is a sin that we don't
want to give up, acknowledge, confess, or ask
forgiveness for
and don't want to hear any more promptings
about it from the Holy Spirit, thank you.
It's as if we build a metaphorical brick wall to
keep out the Holy Spirit

The wall gets higher and more impenetrable so that, in the end, we can't hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit at all, cutting off our path to repentance and salvation.

If we desire forgiveness, are open to God and the promptings of the Holy Spirit, confess our sins, we are assured of God's forgiveness and cannot be guilty of the unforgiveable sin.

Choosing to be with Jesus, being one of his insiders, on his team, may not necessarily be the easiest path to follow but it's definitely the best one!

Amen.