

Queer Christ

Wedgewood Baptist Church, Charlotte, North Carolina

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Lesson: Mark 3:20-35

The crowd presses in around Jesus -- so many folks that they couldn't even eat. Out of control, on the verge of chaos. Jesus' family comes to take Jesus away by force because they have heard reports that "he is beside himself," mentally exhausted, insane, crazy! Jesus is breaking social norms. Rubbing against the grain. We can imagine the embarrassment of Jesus' family. "Well, he's just not the same boy we brought up." "He didn't act like this at home." Mary and Jesus' siblings stand outside the house waiting to take Jesus away, commitment papers in hand. Jesus is definitely acting queer.

We shouldn't conclude that Mary and her children no longer loved Jesus. Indeed, one of the reasons they were there was out of love for Jesus. But did they understand him? Could they ever understand him? He grew up among them but he had turned out so -- different.

With Jesus' biological family standing just outside the door -- the scribes introduce a new possibility. "Jesus is possessed by Beelzebul; he casts out demons by the prince of demons." Beelzebul -- "the lord of the mansion -- the head of the house." This is an official charge by the scribes. They would have us believe that Jesus is a member of the household of the demonic. "This man, Jesus, is no longer related to these persons outside. He has broken down natural family ties and is now related to evil itself!"

Jesus presents the scribes with several analogies to prove the absurdity of their accusation. Jesus asks, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" "How can good come from evil?" "Kingdoms," if you will, were probably the largest human institutions known to Jesus' world -- much as they are today. Kingdoms split by internal strife cannot survive. Families -- the smallest institutions -- cannot survive internal strife either. A house divided against itself cannot stand.

Jesus plays the devil's advocate, so to speak. OK, he says -- say you're right. Say I'm in league with Beelzebul. Let's say I do cast out demons by the power of the demonic. Recognize the consequences of that! "If Satan has risen up against Satan and is divided, then Satan cannot stand, but is coming to an end!" Even if what you say is true -- then the dominion of evil in this world is being destroyed. The Realm of God is at hand.

But you're wrong. Please note that Jesus didn't put a big smile on his face and say, "I think that we can agree to disagree on this point." No. He didn't say, "Well you have a right to your opinion." No. He said, "You're wrong!" The scribes were wrong. "You cannot enter the house of the strong and plunder their goods without first binding the strong -- then you can enter the house and plunder." The only way I can cast out Satan's demons, Jesus is saying, is by first binding

Satan so that Satan cannot interfere. In respect to Jesus' "natural" relationship to his family: Is it Jesus' behavior that causes the rift with his family, or is it his family's inability to accept that behavior and their worry about what other people might think that causes the rift?

Jesus says to the scribes and the people crowding in around him, "Truly I say to you, all sins will be forgiven human beings, and whatsoever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."

Jesus says this, according to Mark, because the scribes had said, "Jesus has an unclean spirit." Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, then, is a symptom of a severe, deep and perversity -- an inability to distinguish good from evil. The scribes had fallen to this level of perversity. They could no longer tell that the Spirit through which Jesus worked was good, was of God -- and they called it evil. They called what God did - evil. That, my friends, is the ultimate sin and the only one Jesus says will never be forgiven.

"Jesus' mother and brothers came; and standing outside they sent to Jesus and called him. And a crowd was sitting about Jesus; and they said, "Jesus; your mother and brothers are outside asking for you." And Jesus replied, "Who are my mother and brothers?" And looking around at the people sitting next to him, around him in the room, Jesus said, "here, here are my mother and my siblings! Whoever does the will of God, they are my sisters and my brothers, my mother and my father."

Looking around at his disciples, Jesus must have smiled. Peter, Simon, Mary Magdalene. Perhaps Mary and Martha had come up for the weekend -- all the others seated in the room. "Here, here is my family." Jesus was not renouncing his biological family. Jesus recognized the fact that ties of the spirit are creative. The spirit creates family which is beyond the umbilical cord.

Who are my sisters and brothers and mother? Whoever does the will of God.

There is a strain of thought among Christians that proclaims that God's love is a different kind of love from that we inflict on each other. This strain of thought sets as a goal a disembodied love: so called "agape". This school of thought worships a savior who was never fully human; a neutered savior; a savior who is not anatomically correct. This strain of thought presents to us a savior to whom we can no more relate personally than we could to a stone idol.

But God's ultimate message of love is incarnation. The Word become flesh. God become flesh to show us love. The gospel stories are of Jesus as a human being. The Jesus of scripture was a scandalously specific man, whose stomach rumbled, whose nose ran, whose skin pebbled, whose fantasies ran as wild as ours. Jesus was a human being, who wept great gut-wrenching sobs at the death of someone he loved dearly. Jesus was a human being, who walked the halls of his junior high school holding his books in front of him just as often as any pubescent boy in any time. The Word became FLESH!

Jesus was completely silent on the subject of same gender affection and relationships. The rest of scripture is also silent on same gender relationships in any context other than that of licentiousness and abuse (much the same as scripture is silent on heterosexual relationships in any other context). Through history, the Church Universal has used this absolute silence to decide that sexual relationships between persons of the same gender are condemned in scripture. But in fact, they are simply not discussed.

The Church has not learned from history, nor changed with God's dynamic leadership. Churches have confused themselves with God, the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow -- when that stable God has called us to change with our growing ability to understand who the unchanging God is! Churches continue to be the primary instrument of the subjugation and oppression of lesbians and gay men. Theologians and church members alike claim that being gay or lesbian is sinful. Churches prop up their hatred and abuse on written words. They point to a few verses of scripture and proudly refuse what God has to offer. Sometimes they don't even bother with scripture.

It's got to stop. We've got to stop letting people use God and the church to prop up their own personal fears and prejudices. God does not call us out to be oppressors. If anything *whatsoever* is clear in scripture, then it is that God calls us out to be liberated and then to liberate, to be loved and then to love as we have been loved. To be in Christ is to have the freedom to move *beyond* the safety zones, without ever leaving the safety of God's love. We don't have to protect ourselves -- God will. We don't have to protect the church -- God will. We don't have to protect God -- we couldn't even if we tried. We can let God protect us, while we do what it is God calls us to do.

Many Christian sects have said that the church has to explore new and different ways of being church. But churches have rested on their ecclesiastical butts and refused to move, to grow, to change. And don't be so confused as to believe that this is solely an issue of acceptance of differing sexualities. The church universal doesn't want to change -- has never changed willingly.

Jesus himself, the great example, positively pointed to a new and different way of life only to find himself nailed to a crossbeam bleeding into the parched earth. Martin Luther started wars with his theses. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated for suggesting that "the way we've always done it" was wrong. Great wars have been fought over a few words in different creeds and prayers. The church fights itself to death, ignoring the Gospel imperative to change, ignoring God's repetitive announcement of new things coming, ignoring the imminent doom of old wineskins filled with God's new wine. Churches are floating around in circles caught in eddies of trivial pursuit.

How dare we spend years deciding whether we think it's okay for gay men to go to heaven?!?
How dare we spend months debating the fitness of lesbians to be called by God into ordained ministry?!?!? How dare we spend even two minutes arguing over whether we should use language that is patently exclusive of more than half the world's population? How dare we desire and even enjoy being purveyors of the status quo? How dare we purport to be the Body of Christ while eschewing his clear resounding call to radical discipleship? How dare we be so frivolous about God?

Annie Dillard writes in *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, "On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return."

God will not always strive with human beings. Lukewarm churches nauseate God. Now is the time to stand up and be hot for the gospel. Because Jesus has told us that whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness. Looking at what God has done and is doing and calling it evil is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Sexuality in all its forms is a gift from God. Calling gay men and lesbians and bisexual persons, as persons of alternate sexuality, evil -- that is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. And for this, at least according to Mark, there is no forgiveness.

The status quo church may persecute and oppress as it will. But I'm mad as hell and I'm not gonna take it anymore. We've tried being demur and nice. We've tried listening, and we've tried convincing with calm words. And at every turn, mainline churches have used their idolatry of the Bible to beat and ram and abuse. They have used scripture in a perverse and evil way. With Jesus I'm willing to say to them, "You're wrong." With Jesus I'll refuse to say that they have a right to their evil opinion. With Jesus I'll rebuke their perversity. They are *wrong!*

They say that what God has done is evil. They have called what God made ME evil. They have called ME evil. They have said that who I am is the result of the work of Satan instead of the gift of God. And I've had it. This attribution of the works of God to Evil is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit -- the ultimate sin. The persons who hold these opinions are spiritual perverts! They are wrong.

God has made me who I am. God has made each of you who you are. God has given the world the gift of a variety of sexuality and a variety of expressions of sexuality. It is true that there are those in our world who abuse themselves and others sexually -- but their abuse of the gift does not make the gift itself evil. Being gay, lesbian, bisexual, and, yes, even heterosexual -- these are gifts from God -- and may God have mercy on those who persecute God's other children in the name of fear and hatred. May God have mercy on those who attack God's other children in the name of God. And may God bless congregations like Wedgewood who have broken from the perversity of the modern church, who have shunned the idolatry so prevalent in our time, who welcome all of those God calls into our community.

Hear again these words of Jesus paraphrased and extrapolated from Mark's record:

My parents don't understand. They love me but can't accept who I am. They think I'm crazy -- psychologically unfit.

The highest religious authorities in the land say that I am evil. They say that I am in league with Satan. But am I not known by my fruits? Do I not oppose evil and work for good? Can Satan cast out Satan?

Because of who I am, they say that the good I do is evil.

Because of who they are, they say that the good I do is evil.

They say I am not Christian. They say I am demonic.

They blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

My parents -- my biological family -- they don't understand. They love me but they can't understand me. They think that I'm crazy -- psychologically unfit. They stand off at a distance -- calling to me. Come back, they say. Come back to what we thought you were. Come back to who we want you to be. And I love them.

But I look around the room and see friends. I am reminded that persons always have options. I see people who love me enough to try and understand. To rejoice in my loves and to cry with my disappointments. I see friends -- frail and fragile -- who nevertheless attempt to love -- who attempt to love me as I am and where I am and for who I am. I look to the Table which is set for all to come. "Who are my sisters and brothers and mother," Jesus asked?

I have biological family -- I love them and I hope to have them always. But also I have you. Whoever does the will of God -- is my sister and my brother, my mother and my father.

You are welcome to this chosen family.

AMEN.