

Out of Our Minds: *Mark 3:19b-22; 31-35*

Norwalk Christian Church, May 22, 2016, Trinity Sunday (not observed), Graduates Sunday, Good News Series, Year C

I'm a church kid. I wasn't a pastor's kid like my kids are, but I was a church kid. I grew up in the church. Church was like my second home. And I learned, growing up in church, that there were rules for how we kids should behave in church. Don't talk during worship. Sing, when everyone else is singing. And never, EVER run in the sanctuary! Any number of church members would stop us in our tracks. "What are you doing! This is a church? You can't run in a church!!" You would've thought we opened a keg in the center aisle or drove dirt bikes onto the chancel.

Inevitably it would get back to our parents what we did, that we were caught running in church!!, and we would be in big trouble. After all, I believe "no running in the Sanctuary" is in the New Testament, so...

The other cardinal sin for us church kids was chewing gum in church. My church had fuzzy, orange carpet, but here and there, you'd find a dark black circle on the carpet. Old gum, unable to be removed. These stains were signs of what might happen to us, were we to drop gum onto the carpet.

But there was this old man, I don't even remember his name now, but I will never forget him. He would occasionally burp in the middle of worship. And he ran a secret, underground stick-of-gum cartel, supplying good church kids with sticks of gum. Juicy fruit. Doublemint. Spearmint. We would crouch down behind his pew, and he would give us a piece, and we would slither off, unnoticed by our parents. I guess it was his way of rebelling against the church rules. Perhaps he's the reason why I often find it hard to follow church rules.

Of course no-running and no-chewing gum was only the beginning. I learned as I got older that church rules were much more complicated. Rules like these have kept a lot of people inside the church. But they have also driven a lot of people out. There were things you weren't allowed to say in church. Things about your life you were not allowed to reveal in church. Honesty was *not* the best policy. You couldn't just believe whatever you wanted. You couldn't say what you were thinking. You had to behave. And stray too far off the accepted path, and people began to wonder what happened to you. Were you out of your mind?

For the last few weeks, we've been working our way through the stories of Jesus found in the Gospel of Mark. We're calling this journey, "Good News". Two weeks ago, Marti walked us through a series of stories, all of which had one common theme: Jesus, breaking the religious rules of his day. It's becoming one of Jesus' favorite things to do. In between those stories and our story, today, Jesus calls the rest of his disciples. He's

now the mentor to twelve people. And the first thing Jesus does after calling his 12 disciples is goes home. And when he gets there, he's in trouble.

Someone has told on Jesus. Word has gotten back home, to his family, about how he's been behaving.

"Hey, Mary! Did you hear what your son did? He and his friends refuse to fast when the other good, religious people are fasting. Hey, Mary! Did you hear how Jesus healed a man on the sabbath and he and his disciples were plucking grain on the Sabbath! Hey, Mary! You're son's acting like he can cast out demons! Can't you keep your boy in order! Can't you restrain your son?!"

It's embarrassing, and when Jesus shows up, back home, it's time they deal with it. He's too big to punish, but even Jesus wasn't too big to get a talking to from his mother. You graduates think you're now free, on your own, but you're never to big to get a "talking-to" from your parents. ;-)

Jesus' family goes out and finds Jesus, and Mark says they, "Restrained him." Why? Because they're embarrassed. And they're probably worried about his safety. Everyone is saying that Jesus has gone out of his mind. He's bringing shame to his family. He must be out of his mind.

That's really the only explanation they had. He was "out of his mind." Because he was a good boy. He was raised right. He had good parents. He knows better! He knows this is not how you should act in the synagogue. This is not religious people should behave. You can't just do whatever you want, eat whatever you want, be friends with whomever you want, heal whomever you want.

There's a system in place. Rules that say who is clean and unclean. They are there for a reason, Jesus. They protect us. And, it's what God wants. You can't say those things; you can't be around those people. Jesus, you *must* be out of your mind!

It's embarrassing. But more than that, it's dangerous. The religious leaders come to him, as well. You must be possessed by the spirit of Beelzebul, the prince of the demons. It's their go to criticism. You buck the system, it must be the devil in you. And it's only so long until they deal with that devil.

But what does Jesus do? He keeps doing what he's been doing. Jesus is not getting the message, or he is and he just doesn't care. So his family goes to him again, calls him outside, into private. Jesus is inside the house, with all his fellow rebel-rousers, so they send someone in to get him. They can't be seen with a crowd like that, after all. "You're mother and brothers are looking for you, Jesus," they say to Jesus. And what is his reply? It's not very polite, I'll tell you that.

“Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him--his fellow-rule-breakers, those who didn’t fit in and weren’t “good church kids”, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Now, isn’t that interesting. The religious leaders, Jesus’ own mother and brothers--they’re the ones concerned about “doing the will of God”, yet here is Jesus, breaking all the rules, bucking the system, standing up to the religious leaders and calling crowds of people to do the same--and these outcasts and rebel-rousers, these, Jesus says, are the ones who are doing the will of God. Isn’t that interesting?

The first lesson Jesus has for his newly called Disciples is that you can’t let the rules get in the way of doing God’s will. You can’t let the rules get in the way of doing what you are called to do. Who are the ones who do the will of God? The rule-breakers.

Notice how Mark tells the story. Jesus is inside. And who is inside with him? Those who are normally on the outside...the fellow outcasts and rule-breakers. And who is outside the house? His family are outside. Those who are inside with Jesus are the very ones the religious establishment kept on the outside.

The point Jesus is making is not very subtle. You want to be inside with Jesus, this is how you act. Church rules, right thinking--these are not for disciples of Christ. What matters is not doing things decently and in order and behaving in the right way. What matters is getting “out of our minds” for God. What matters radical love, for all people. The rule-breakers. Those “out of their minds”. These, Jesus says, are his true family.

And to you, who are graduating, to your families--to us all--Jesus calls to us. If you want to live a life of meaning and purpose, a Christ-like life--don’t spend your time worrying about all the rules and staying in your right mind. If you want to make God happy, be out of your mind, every now and then. Buck the system. Go against the status-quo. If a rule gets in the way of your calling; if a rule gets in the way of your ability to show God’s love to someone--that rule needs breaking.

Because in Jesus’ house, all are welcome. And Jesus means it. And any rule that would keep someone away from God, must be broken. And *anyone* who would stand in the way of a person and God, well, that person may find themselves outside Jesus’ house, worried about keeping the rules, but missing out on God’s great Jubilee. Because, let’s be honest. Was Jesus really in his right mind when he showed us love and grace? We’ve been brought inside the house of God, where we don’t belong, but this is our home, where we are always welcome, no matter how many rules we break along the way.

May we hear the Good News today: Jesus broke all the rules so that you and I would know that we are loved by God. May we go out from this place, out of our minds with Christ’s love, and do the same. Amen.