

## When Jesus Is Among Us

We asked the question last Sunday, "What will be the evidence of the Lord's living presence among us; how shall we know He is here when He is here? We answered that question in the following ways. #1, we will know He is here because He will cause a stir, and people will be drawn to Him and to us because of what He is doing among us.

#2, we will know He is here because when He is here the Devil will put up a fuss. You know, as long as we are spiritually asleep or inactive the Devil will work quietly behind the scenes. Since we pose no threat to his kingdom, he'll be careful to not to wake us up. But, when we begin to truly worship and grow in the Lord and begin to obey the Lord in our daily lives, his royal ugliness, can get--well, down right ugly. I remember one time finding an old wooden workbench in the basement of a church parsonage. It looked perfectly fine until I disturbed it, but when I moved it I discovered it's rotten legs were filled with earwigs. Those creepy looking pincer bugs came crawling out of the bench legs in droves. Had I not jostled the workbench the earwigs would have kept on eating until the workbench would not have had a leg to stand on. With the earwigs discovered they could be cast out and the bench could be repaired. The teaching for us to take to heart here is that just because we can't see demons, doesn't mean they are not there, gnawing at the foundations of our spiritual lives and at the foundations of our church. When Jesus is present among us in power, the spiritual battle we must fight will become more evident.

And, #3, the third evidence of the Lord's living presence among us is that He will call us into a more intimate relationship with Him from which we will be empowered and sent forth to overcome evil and to proclaim the Good News of God's love and salvation to others.

To summarize what we have see so far, whenever Jesus is present, people will be drawn to Him, demonic opposition will arise, and disciples will be called to spread the Good News of God to others. In the last 15 verses of the 3rd Chapter of Mark, we discover three more things that will be true whenever and wherever Jesus is present. Look at Mark 3:20-21: "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.'"

This brings up an interesting question: When was the last time someone looked at what we were doing for Jesus or for others in the name of Jesus and said, "You must be out of your mind!" "You're nuts!" "You obviously don't have both oars in the water!" "Your

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elevator doesn't go all the way to the top!" Not long ago a fellow pastor whom I know rather well ran into some opposition in his church. He was only seeking to follow the Lord and to bring healing to the division that had arisen in his congregation. Some of the people who had taken a stand against him, went to his wife and said, "we think your husband is insane; you'd better get him some help." I know this pastor well enough that I can say with great confidence that he is as sane as you or me, or at least as sane as you; I may be a questionable standard for saneness.

We need to remember that as followers of Jesus Christ, we are not to conform to the standards of this world but to allow God to transform us by the renewing of our minds. We are called to walk by faith not by sight. This will not look normal to those who do not believe. In John 15:18-21, Jesus says, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me."

If no one has questioned our sanity lately because of our radical commitment and obedience to Jesus Christ, then maybe we ought to ask why not? Then maybe we ought to pray for greater faith, more obedience, increased boldness in our witness. Whenever Jesus is truly present among us, we will look more than a little suspect to the eyes of worldly people. Our love for the Lord, our willingness to sacrifice time and energy for others, our love and forgiveness for our enemies, will be interpreted as strange. Even Jesus' own family thought He had lost His mind. When Jesus is truly present among us and we are truly walking not by the flesh but by His Spirit, we can expect that similar accusations will be lobbed against us. When we are wholly sold out to Jesus, those looking in from the outside will think we must be crazy. Are you willing to be thought crazy for Christ?

Mark 3:22 takes us in a slightly different direction, Mark tells us, "And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.'" In reminiscence our first point, you may think I'm crazy for saying what I'm going to say next, but if we are going to get serious about following Jesus in a manner consistent with the New Testament witness, we can expect supernatural manifestations of the presence of the Holy Spirit within us and among us. We can expect healings to be

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given in answer to our prayers; we can expect miracles; we can expect to see people wonderfully delivered from their demons. We can expect the unexpected.

And, when such things do happen we can also expect someone to say "this is of the devil." It must be of the devil because God stopped doing miracles in His church a long time ago. It's interesting to note that some thought the same thing in the time of Jesus. If Jesus is present among us in power and acts of power begin to be seen on a more regular basis, not only will some people think we are crazy; some will think we are possessed. If they said it of Jesus they will say it of us. Some will think we're crazy and some will think we are possessed. But if this is what means to be crazy and what it means to be possessed, so be it.

For anyone who tends to be frightened by the thought of manifestations of the Holy Spirit in our midst or who would tend to be critical of such things, I would call you attention to Mark 3:28-30. After making it clear that the idea that He cast out demons by the power of demons is absurd, Jesus says to the Pharisees, "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit." Calling evil good or good evil is a very serious offense against God and anyone who persists in such unbelief with such a critical spirit, cannot be forgiven. Persistent rejection of the Holy Spirit is the one unforgivable sin.

When Jesus is present among us, and we are living under the direction and in the power of the Holy Spirit, some people will think we're crazy and some people will think we are possessed. We see a third evidence of Jesus' presence in verses 31-32: "Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

The third evidence of Jesus among us that we see in our Scripture passage this morning is a redefinition of family and the creation of the Family of God. The secular definition of family concerns itself with genetics. Those born to the same human parents, have the same grandparents, or have common descendants, are considered family. Our family status is determined by our DNA or, in some cases, by what it says on our papers of adoption. The other way you get into a family is to be married into it.

It was the traditional understanding of family that was held when some people in the crowd announced to Jesus that his mother and brothers were looking for Him. We need to understand that Jesus was not being disrespectful of His flesh and blood family when He responded the way He did, but this was what we might call a "teachable moment," and so Jesus taught. And, since His mother and brothers were already questioning His sanity, He might as well give them something more to chew on. So, He says in verses 33-35, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

This is pretty powerful when you stop to think it through. Some of us are very proud of our family connections, and like to boast that we belong to such and such a family. We want people to know who our mother and father or grandmother or grandfather happened to be. We feel very special to have come from their genes. On the other hand, if your mother was an alcoholic or a drug addict or a prostitute and your father was a gang member and a murderer, you might want to hide your family connection. You might be afraid of being judged according to the more infamous members of your family tree. The family connections we have after the natural order can work in our favor or work against us; it all depends where we came from, but we had no say in the matter one way or the other.

But when it comes to being part of the Family of God, genetics do not matter. Physical DNA doesn't count. As far as our connection to Christ is concerned it doesn't matter where you came from. It doesn't matter if your father and mother were the best people who ever lived or the worst people who ever lived. "If anyone is in Christ," says Paul, "he is a new creation." All who have received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and live believing in Him and honoring Him, are part of the Family of God. They are His mothers and sisters and brothers. We are all family. We can all be one in the Family of God.

I love my flesh and blood family and am very grateful that most of those who belong to that family also belong to the Family of God. But, the only thing that's going to matter in Eternity is our family connection to Jesus Christ. Belonging to Him and to His forever family is the only connection that counts. Every one of us here this morning can be a part of that great family.

But, how are we to know whether we are a part of that family or not? First let me remind you of how we cannot tell. We cannot tell that someone has become part of the family of God because he or she

had Christian parents. We cannot tell just because someone came to the altar one time and claimed to have received Jesus. We cannot tell just because someone was baptized. We cannot tell on the basis of church membership. We cannot tell because someone attends Sunday School. How can we tell who is a member of the Family of God? What does Jesus say? Jesus says, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." Jesus also said, "by their fruits you will know them."

I was talking with my old friend, Glenn Peck at the General Conference meetings in Findlay Ohio last week, and Glenn was telling me how they choose Elders in their church. They don't vote on them like we normally do here. Glenn said, "Elders start acting like Elders before they are recognized as Elders." He said, "if a person walks like an Elder, and talks like an Elder, prays like an Elder, teaches like an Elder, and otherwise acts like an Elder, he probably is one. Elders and Deacons are identified and called to serve on the basis of their service, not by a popular election.

This is the measure Jesus uses for membership in His family. Those who regularly live in obedience to God's commands, and in the true spirit of those commands, show evidence that the Spirit of Christ lives within them; those who don't, don't. What do the lives we live tell us and tell others about our relationship to Christ and to His family? If Jesus is truly present in our lives, we will walk like Christ, talk like Christ, pray like Christ, and otherwise act like Christ. Other people may say we are crazy. They may say we are demon possessed, but they will never be able to find real fault in what we do, because what we do comes from above and what comes from above is good.

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Mark 3:20-35

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