

Saturday, March 11, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 16

Matthew 12:46–50

⁴⁶ While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷ Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”

⁴⁸ He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Reflection

It is fairly well accepted that Matthew borrows a lot of his material and structure from Mark. However, Matthew is not afraid to shape the material to tell his own story of Jesus, bringing out the salient points for his community. This passage is a good example. In Mark the story is sharp. Mark sandwiches Jesus’s family hearing about Jesus, thinking he’s crazy and setting out to get him home. Then the narrative shifts to the Pharisees accusing Jesus as driving out demons by the power of demons. Then Jesus’s family arrives and he rebuffs their attempts by claiming his obedient disciples as his true family. Matthew has all the pieces, but he shapes the story differently.

Once again, Matthew is focused on to what degree does the presence of the kingdom bring division? There has been woe to cities, there has been adjustment to sabbath keeping, there has been children of God and children of the devil. Now, his own family approaches—just to speak with him. And, Jesus uses this moment to illustrate the cost of discipleship. When the kingdom comes, what is the basis for familial claim? Is it birth, or blood? Is it region or country? Is it nationality or shared ancestry? No, now, those who share Jesus’s Father by doing his will, are the ones who have the claim to familial obligation. This theme of division will carry through into Jesus’s teaching through the parables.

The kingdom of God creates (or reveals as good trees bear good fruit) insiders and outsiders. This isn’t new: the Law itself was about demarcating those who lived according to God’s will and those who didn’t. What has changed is Jesus’s presence. To do God’s will now, is to follow him and learn how to live in accordance with God’s kingdom now reveal in the Messiah. Those who do this, are the ones who are members of God’s family irrespective of birth, region, nationality, etc.

So, as we come to the text, we need to begin by expressing our discomfort. We do not like divisions. We want everyone to belong. We want to flatten things out so that people can just easily step over the bar. In fact, we want to get rid of the bar at times. Of course, this is a false peace because the insiders and the outsiders still exist. There are still those who do the will of the Father and those who don’t. What has changed is merely the appearance. By pretending there is no differences among us, simply leaves people in a sorry condition of being enslaved to sin. Jesus has come to set, especially the lowly, free from the rule of sin and death.

On the other hand, we can be too enamoured with the notions of insiders and outsiders. “Insider” can be a badge of moral superiority and “outsider” of inferiority and uncleanness. The insiders can run the risk of simply huddling together behind closed doors, a body of saints remaining free of the taint of the world. That is not the will of the Father. No, Jesus steps out of those doors and eats with, talks with, and even touches those who are sinful, shameful, diseased, and unclean in order to call them into the kingdom. It is significant that his own mother and brothers come to be numbered among his disciples. Thus, he gains them back, much to his delight I have no doubt.

Prayer

Lord, forgive us for the times when we prefer the status quo to the powerful work of gospeling God’s beloved creatures. And, forgive us for creating holy silos, abandoning those you love and have worked to set free. Holy Spirit, grant to us the courage to follow Jesus, doing the will of the Father. Amen.