

June 14 2015

## **Scripture Lessons**

*Psalm 92*

*II Corinthians 4:13-5:1*

*Mark 3:20-35*

## **Sermon**     *Extended Family*

Many of you, I think, will remember a motion picture from the 1940s called Harvey. Does that sound familiar to you? I like it because of the strange character sometime. It features Jimmy Stewart as man called Elwood, and showcases Elwood's imaginary eight-foot rabbit called Harvey. Elwood comes from an old aristocratic family in the city and had at one point in life been an ambitious high-powered business executive active in the community and he was also, busy with all sorts of civic and charitable causes. But of late his personality has begun to change. He didn't work on a steady basis anymore but instead takes a great deal of time just sitting in bars and drinking martinis and just talking to himself. In spite all of this apparently everyone that he would meet considered Elwood a wonderful guy. He is relaxed, he's calm, he is sweet he is polite and generous to a fault and would do almost anything for anybody that asks. This wouldn't be bad in itself but for the fact that Elwood attributes his change of life-style and personality to his relationship with an eight-foot tall white rabbit named Harvey which he only is able to see. You can imagine his sister and his niece with whom he lives and the judge who handles their business affairs feels it is necessary eventually to take matters in their own hands. Elwood has not only become a nuisance and an embarrassment to the family but he is squandering the family fortune. He is loaning money to all sorts of questionable people and, he is buying martinis for everybody in town and so the three of them conspire to have Elwood committed to a mental institution. Later in the picture, of course, we find that there is a miracle drug that Elwood could take that would shock him back to reality and so important choices have to be made. Elwood has to see whether his happiness with Harvey or his family desires or needs are more important in his life. And Elwoods' family has to decide which Elwood is the real Elwood or at least the Elwood which they are willing to accept and live within the future. Of course if you have seen the movie you remember what Elwood and the family chooses Harvey in the end and Elwood walks out in the moonlight to live happily ever after with his eight-foot tall invisible rabbit named Harvey

Listen to Mark's Gospel this morning that tells about a similar incident in the family that feels the need to have a brother committed as well. Likewise the brother must decide whether what his family considers is important or what he considers a higher good will come first on his list of priorities. Jesus who is the brother in the story is pictured here doing what Jesus always does in the Gospel; he is casting out demons, feeding the hungry, preaching and teaching the good news; but he has gathered such a crowd around him and said such provocative things and drawing such attention to himself that his family and religious leaders believe that he has to be committed and is nuts. As a result they try to have him put away so he is not going to be an embarrassment to them any longer. Jesus tried to explain to them the folly of their concern and reminds them of the good result of what he is doing bear witness to the fact his direction in life comes from God. But his appeals seem to fall on deaf ears. The family continues in trying to silence him and finally Jesus reminds his family about something that not many of us want to hear sometimes that those who are related to him by blood are not his only family members but instead anyone that does God's will in his brother and his sister and his mother.

The same story is recorded in Luke's Gospel and is even more radical in the way that it shows the tension between family members and faith commitment. Jesus says here that anyone that comes to him and does not hate his family and even his own life, that person cannot be a disciple of Jesus. Now if we were to take this at face value, it would be a pretty hard pill to swallow. Does this story really mean that Jesus does not value family relationships? Anybody that knows the breadth and depth of the story of Jesus' life knows that it is a conclusion that we cannot draw about Jesus' life, it has to take on a new meaning. I don't think it is so much an emotional that we see it as Jesus' looks at it as the paths that we choose in life. Jesus would never want us to despise or mistreat our family any way but he does call us to a radical form of discipleship. One of which the priorities and the desires of our family and those of God may not always mesh on a daily basis. Followers of Jesus may have to make some difficult choices when it comes to make spiritual values or priorities into the proper perspective. What in the world is Jesus saying then?

First of all from the point of view of Mark's Gospel, Jesus is telling us that people of faith the word family takes on a broader and a more joyous meaning than from the simple dictionary definition, this means that family means more than those that are related to us by blood but also every person who is part of our church family, our family of faith and that I think is an exciting prospect indeed.

Secondly though from Luke's perspective Jesus reminds us that when our priorities are clear in life and our faith in God can help order everything else that is a part of our larger lives. Then this is a case when our family life a very high place

in our list of priorities. But Jesus also reminds us that this is not always going to be an easy process. There will be cost involved if our family relationship is to have a high priority in our lives. Sometimes work, sometimes material possessions, sometimes personal gain, sometimes recreational pursuits will have to take a back seat for ultimate good of our family. In addition Jesus reminds us there is evidently a time and situation when family members will not have the same faith commitment that anyone of us might have. And there will be times when we might have to wrestle as to how our life of faith and our family life fit together in the real world

This is a story; I often think about the Japanese student that I met in seminary. He came from an ancient family of Shinto priests and when he embraced Christianity and he went into training for ministry. He was cut off and he was shunned by his family of Shinto priests. They would have nothing to do with him from that point on. And his extended Christian family however small that family was became his family and became his primary source of emotional and spiritual support. Now thankfully for most of us that drastic turn of events is not part of our everyday experience but if we take Jesus idea of the extended family seriously there are inevitably going to be times as I mentioned before where there will be wrestling matches in each of our lives as well. And the result it may mean we put aside some of the things we want to do to love our neighbors and act upon that in practical and concrete ways as well.

So two lessons then are to be learned from these two versions of the Gospel story; first from Luke's Gospel we learn that sometimes being Christians means adjusting our ideas of family and to embrace a new larger family; a church family in order to be in tune with God's leading in our lives. Secondly from Mark's Gospel we are reminded that sometimes taking of this notion of extended family maybe simple or maybe complicated as accepting people who maybe strangers into our family as part as a new extended family of God. Remember then as you go into this new week the question Jesus asked himself, where is my mother? Where is my brother? And remember Jesus answer, also, here is my brother and here is my mother and whoever does the will of God, is my brother is my sister my mother  
And together we say AMEN.