

Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church

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Genesis 3:8-13
Mark 3:20-35

INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

We hear coaches say it all the time – we don't know that much about ourselves until we run into some adversity. When everything we try is successful, when there is no one who is questioning how and why we are doing what we are doing, we don't have to examine our core values and commitments. We just keep doing what has been working.

Sometimes, we assume that if we are doing good things and we are getting good results, then we won't face any pushback. But that wasn't true for Jesus. We hear early in Mark's Gospel that he had been healing people who had a variety of health needs. As a result, the main problems he faced were dealing with the crowds of people who were wanting to hear his teaching and who were pressing in on him so that he could lay hands on them to heal them from their ailments. The crowds got so big there along the shoreline of the sea that he at times had to have a boat to step into so he didn't get forced into the water by the burgeoning multitudes. Things were going swimmingly, so to speak. At times, Jesus and his followers had a hard time finding time and space just to eat a meal.

Jesus was probably in the town of Capernaum, where two of his followers, Simon and Andrew, were from. In the account we were reading from Mark, perhaps he was in their house, which was filled with people who were seeking his wise words and healing actions. It is at this point that members of Jesus' own family come to the house seeking to get him to change what he was doing. Perhaps they had gotten wind that some of the Hebrew religious leaders had gotten so threatened by Jesus words and actions that they were already considering how to get rid of him, as we are told earlier in this third chapter of Mark. They also seem to be responding to concerns that Jesus was in his right mind. Where we would say 'he was beside himself,' or as our translation has it, "He has gone out of his mind," in the original language the verb literally meant that he was 'standing outside of himself.' They were standing outside the house concerned that Jesus was standing outside of himself. It sounds like they were wanting to save him from himself, from his deep passion to minister to those who were viewed as outsiders in religious circles. Mary wouldn't be the first mother wanting to tell her offspring that they could be hanging with a little better crowd. We are told that the family actually wanted to restrain Jesus, physically taking him away from what he was doing. Their motivation might well have been pure, acting out of concern for Jesus' well-being, since they could see that he was having a hard time meeting his own needs even for a meal or some rest, and his actions were provoking groups of religious leaders, putting his life at risk. Or there might have been just a smidgen of concern about the family's reputation with Jesus' commitment to hanging out with these outsiders who were not the most respected citizens around.

Then we hear once again from religious leaders who were very focused on defining who would have status as an insider and who would be an outsider. They viewed Jesus as an outsider and they were having trouble figuring out a way to criticize the good things that Jesus had been

doing, including freeing people who had been dominated by detrimental spirits, so they demonized him, saying he must be working for Satan to have power over the evil spirits he had been casting out. It reminds me of the practice some had back during the Cold War of labeling one's political opponents as Communists in an attempt to discredit them. Jesus responds to their efforts pointing out that their verbal attack on him didn't make much sense, that what they were suggesting was as if Satan was attacking his own forces. He wasn't doing Satan's work. Neither was he standing outside of himself as his family had feared. He was standing inside of himself, living out who he was to be, carrying out God's will for the well-being of all, including those who were resisting his ministry.

So Jesus didn't cave in to the pressures from his own family or from certain religious leaders who were quite uncomfortable with his ministry. He said those some considered to be outsiders who had crowded inside the house were as important to him as his own mother or brothers or sisters. In so doing, he redefined family to include those who were united in purpose seeking God's wholeness as a family of faith.

There are times when we will have to decide who we are going to be as a person of faith. There is a girl whose name is Malala Yousafzai, who was raised in the Swat Valley of Pakistan, where violent religious extremist Taliban forces try to intimidate those who support the education of girls. As a person of the Muslim faith, Malala has been an outspoken advocate for her own education and for that of girls across the world. Even in her pre-teen years under an assumed name, she had blogged and spoken for this cause. Over time, the Taliban came to know her identity, and one day when she was riding a bus home from school, a Taliban gunman forced his way onto the bus yelling, "Who is Malala?" He shot her in the head, but thankfully she got wonderful medical care and not only survived, but continued her advocacy, writing a book named I am Malala. Showing great bravery, among the places she has gotten to speak was before the general assembly of the United Nations. Last October, she became the youngest person to ever win the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of seventeen.¹ The religious extremists who are against education for girls thought Malala had to be out of her mind for her views and for taking such a risk on behalf of herself and others. But she was not standing outside of herself, just as Jesus was not standing outside of himself. Rather he was doing what God had called him to do.

I am thankful for the young people who have gone through the church's confirmation process who met with the Session and were before you today. They and all of us who seek to be followers of Jesus Christ have the challenge to find how to stand inside of who we are, being uniquely ourselves, while following God's call upon our lives. Our journey may not be as risky as it was for Jesus or for Malala, but we are likely to encounter some resistance along the way, maybe even from some well-meaning people, particularly when we follow Christ's example of standing up for those who are considered to be outsiders. Being an insider or outsider for Christ had primarily to do with whether he was inside God's will for his life and ministry. He found a way to be inside God's will while standing inside of himself, inside of who he was, by standing on behalf of those derisively considered to be outsiders. There is a way for us to be inside God's will for our lives and inside who we have been uniquely created to be – that's the main insider status I hope we will seek.

¹ http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/book-review-i-am-malala-by-malala-yousafzai/2013/10/11/530ba90a-329a-11e3-9c68-1cf643210300_story.html