

Mark 3:20-35 Common English Bible

Jesus entered a house. A crowd gathered again so that it was impossible for him and his followers even to eat. When his family heard what was happening, they came to take control of him. They were saying, "He's out of his mind!" The legal experts came down from Jerusalem. Over and over they charged, "He's possessed by Beelzebul. He throws out demons with the authority of the ruler of demons." When Jesus called them together he spoke to them in a parable: "How can Satan throw Satan out? A kingdom involved in civil war will collapse. And a house torn apart by divisions will collapse. If Satan rebels against himself and is divided, then he can't endure. He's done for. No one gets into the house of a strong person and steals anything without first tying up the strong person. Only then can the house be burglarized. I assure you that human beings will be forgiven for everything, for all sins and insults of every kind. But whoever insults the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. That person is guilty of a sin with consequences that last forever." He said this because the legal experts were saying, "He's possessed by an evil spirit."

His mother and brothers arrived. They stood outside and sent word to him, calling for him. A crowd was seated around him, and those sent to him said, "Look, your mother, brothers, and sisters are outside looking for you." He replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Looking around at those seated around him in a circle, he said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother, sister, and mother."

I wonder how you responded to the opening hymn: "Quirky, Queer and Wonderful"? Maybe you found it delightful and refreshing, maybe there was a little bristle ... whether at the word 'queer' or because a beloved hymn ("All Things Wise and Wonderful") has been changed.

'Queer' is an interesting word. Originally it meant 'odd/ different/strange' and then in the last century it turned into an insult, a slur, against anyone with a whiff of 2SLGBTQ. Eventually the 2SLGBTQ community reclaimed the word and they adopted it, transforming the word from a weapon into a badge of honour and something to celebrate. **Queer** is now an umbrella term for people who are not heterosexual or are not cisgender (someone born a particular gender and is still that gender). We used to use "gay" as an umbrella term, but queer is the new umbrella term — though you have to be a bit careful because not everyone, in particular older gay people, own or relate to that word.

We struggle with people who are strange or different from us. "He's out of his mind!" That's what his family and the religious authorities said about Jesus.

In our scripture reading Jesus is called out by two groups for being strange and not behaving “normally.” In this reading, both his family and the religious authorities seek to take control of Jesus and put him back on track. They want him to straighten out and fly right! The first group is his family. We don’t have the whole story, so we have to read into things a little, but we know that his family are not thrilled with how things are going. He’d always been such a good boy, but now he was acting strangely, teaching strange things. Instead of *“He’s out of his mind,”* other translations read *“He is beside himself.”* In other words, his family has a sense of who Jesus is and who he should be, and he was not behaving that way. He is outside of his true self — according to his family. Now part of this I believe is rooted in **genuine care for Jesus**. Take a listen: *“Jesus entered a house. A crowd gathered again so that it was impossible for him and his followers even to eat. When his family heard what was happening, they came to take control of him. They were saying, “He’s out of his mind!”*

Things are nuts! The crowd is so big and demanding that neither Jesus nor his followers have time to eat! In this story I think there is both a good intention and a selfish intention from Jesus’ family.

Sometimes people are their own worst enemy and they could use an intervention by people who love and care about them. “Hey, you don’t seem to be healthy right now. Your behaviour is harming you and it’s harming your work and relationships. You need to make a change and we’re here for you.” Interventions can be difficult but good — even the loving thing to do.

I suspect that part of what the family was doing had a centre of genuine care. However, this intervention is also rooted in fear and a concern for themselves. The family probably doesn’t like all the drama and almost certainly they don’t like the conflict with the religious authorities. They might be afraid or embarrassed — maybe even ashamed by the drama. ‘How will this reflect on us? What will they think of us?’

Jesus’ culture was a big **honour and shame culture**. Everyone stood somewhere on the scale of honour and shame. (Bunny trail note — if you read the gospel stories with that in mind, it will give you a deeper perspective on the story of Jesus.) If you read the story and understand that the goal of people in Jesus’ day was to be someone of honour and not be someone who brought shame to themselves, their family and their tribe, it makes for an interesting read.

What did honour look like in Jesus’ day? Having a seat of prominence at the table, riding into Jerusalem on a horse with an army around you, being a religious leader with colourful vestments. Honour! Now think about what a shameful life might look like, and remember how Jesus ended his life: arrested, mocked, tortured and killed on a cross with criminals. Talk about the height of shame. Jesus continually seems to choose shame — not for shame’s sake— but because he was there to shake up the perceptions of what was good and honourable in God’s eyes and in the eyes of

society.

That takes us to the second group who came out against Jesus: the religious authorities. I don't think anyone likes to be in conflict with "authorities", people in power, whether the religious or state authorities. It's not just the local authorities here — the legal experts from Jerusalem have come to deal with the situation. They don't just think that Jesus has lost his senses — *they think he's possessed*. They think he is evil and that it is Beelzebul (the prince of demons) at work in him.

Two side notes on that. In the scripture verse Jesus talks about how all sin will be forgiven except *the sin of grieving the Holy Spirit*. Sometimes people get freaked out by that. What is happening here is that these religious authorities have failed to recognize that it **is** the Holy Spirit of God that is at work in Jesus. Not only do they not recognize the Holy Spirit, they deny and say that it is in fact an evil spirit. Calling what is God and what is good *evil* is not good. God is good. All the time. So, to deny who God is — to deny the goodness, the holiness of the Holy Spirit and to reverse and say that it is evil — well, just don't!

How do you discern the spirits? How do you discern if something **is** from God or **is not** from God? That's another topic, but pray about it: "God, help me know if this is from you or not!" I've told the story before of being at the Airport church in Toronto which was (and probably still is) a wild and woolly church, where people were being filled with the spirit and then falling on the floor. I lined up at the back to be prayed for because of FOMO. (Fear of Missing Out!) But as I stood in line I was praying "God, if this is not from you, protect me and help me to know! But if this **is** from you, don't let me miss it!" As they prayed for me, I felt like those who were praying were gently pushing me back and I was resisting.

My spirit was like "Nope!" but then I heard a voice say, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!" and I felt like I was supposed to let go. I did — and as I lay down on the floor, I felt an incredible heat, and then a healing and wonderful laughter. I felt such joy, such healing! In the end, that's how you discern the spirits. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience. Jesus said, "You will know a tree by its fruit." So here was Jesus healing people, setting them free from anything that held them captive; and the religious authorities, instead of seeing this amazing and wonderful fruit, said "This is evil."

It reminds me of a quote from C.S. Lewis about the divinity of Jesus. He said that we can't see Jesus as just a good moral teacher. Lewis, speaking in 1942 (and published in *Mere Christianity* in 1952), gave the argument its most memorable formulation:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would

either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell.

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. . . . Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”(*Mere Christianity*, 55-56)”

Here’s the thing. The family of Jesus and the religious authorities both see Jesus as being strange, queer, not right, beside himself. It seems that his family comes around; certainly, his mother does, because she follows him to the foot of the cross. The authorities never do change their minds; in the end it is the religious authorities who see him as such a threat that they have him killed.

But to the disciples and to those of us who have said to Jesus “You are Lord. I love you and want you to come into my life and be my God”, not only is Jesus not off-centre, he is **the** centre. Jesus is perfectly centred, rooted in God. Jesus isn’t strange for strange sake, he is strange because he was created this way and he is living perfectly, authentically, wholly as he is called to live.

To those of you who are part of the queer community, I want to say that I’m so sorry if you have been or felt judged by the church. I am sorry if someone, especially a Christian, has looked at you and instead of seeing beauty and goodness has said that you are sinful. If you have heard that, I’m sorry. Jesus experienced something very similar. If you have been rejected by your family, or perhaps are afraid to come out and be authentically who you are because of your family, I’m so sorry. Those of us who are heterosexual and cis-gendered may have no idea how hard it is to risk rejection from those who matter the most in our life.

But I want you to see that Jesus risked rejection from his family. His family in this moment don’t get it. What does Jesus do? He moves on. He essentially says “If you won’t accept me then I will find acceptance elsewhere. I will find family right where I am.” They said to him:

“Look, your mother, brothers, and sisters are outside looking for you.” He replied, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” Looking around at those seated around him in a circle, he said, “Look, here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God’s will is my brother, sister, and mother.”

Rooted in God, Jesus finds belonging wherever he goes, regardless of what others think.

Jesus knew that his true identity and sense of belonging was rooted in God. He knew that if the world rejected him, and it would— even the crowds, who love him now in the passage we read, would turn against him and cry out “crucify him!” — even then he would find his belonging in God and in those who recognize the spirit of God. From the cross Jesus forgives those who have rejected him and crucified him. “*Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.*” He prays forgiveness, but he is not thrown off centre by the rejection. He remains true to himself ... true to God... *and he remains strange in the eyes of the world.*

I’m always impressed when people come out of the closet. It takes huge courage to stand up and say “This is me. Take it or leave it.” I think I’m impressed because I struggle a bit with what others think. I remember with so much love and fondness



Heather Eyerly. Heather passed away from breast cancer 7 years ago this month at the age of 46. She and Suzanne were the first same-sex couple married in this church. It was a marvellous and joy-filled wedding! There was so much good to celebrate. Heather was so open. She didn’t sneak out of the closet — it was like she came out with spotlights on and announced with a huge smile to the world “Ta da! Here I am and I am fabulous!” Heather and Suzanne drove around Blockhouse Island in a convertible for all the world to see and celebrate their wedding.

Her license plate was “BEYRSLF.” When they went to the U.S. for their honeymoon Heather was driving, and the US border guard asked the purpose of their visit. She had no hesitation telling him that they just got married and were on their honeymoon. The border guard said, “I guess you’re ‘being yourself!’”

Friends, there is so much freedom in being the person you were created to be, instead of being who your family or the authorities or anyone else says you should be. Diversity is God’s idea. A garden with one kind of flower is a bit of a boring garden. Don’t be afraid to shine and be who you were created to be!



You think the 2SLGBTQ community is strange? Those who choose to follow Jesus are increasingly the weird ones! Those of us who say there is another way to live ... a way of love, a way of peace. A way of forgiveness. A way of denying our false selves and

following Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Nothing could be stranger! Nothing could be more life giving and wonderful!

Thanks be to God.
Amen.

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On June 10, 1925, the United Church of Canada was born after much consultation, compromise, and listening for the Spirit. In 1988, The United Church of Canada decided that sexual orientation would no longer be a barrier to membership in the United Church and hence to candidacy for ministry. In 2009, gender identity was added to that decision. Today we celebrate Pride in many United Churches across the country.

Some of us come today celebrating and knowing lots about Pride. Some come today celebrating and knowing a little about Pride. And some of us come today not sure what to expect but here to learn what we can. So, let's begin with a bit of background. Pride is a celebration of diversity relating to gender identity and sexual orientation. Pride is also a chance to promote self-affirmation, dignity, equality, and fundamental human rights, and to celebrate in a safe environment. In response to the ways prejudice and discrimination cause shame, Pride asserts that all are beloved by God.

The Pride Parade has its roots in a 1970 march in New York City, which marked a pivotal moment of the LGBTQ community's resistance to police brutality, oppression, and human rights violations that had resulted in the Stonewall riots a year earlier, in 1969. Since the 1980s, this liberation movement has morphed into the Pride movement. Parades, festivities, and celebrations are held to mark improved rights for this marginalized community, supported by allies of all walks of life, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people.