

Conversations on
Mark 3:20–35

Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.

Idea! In the movie *The Way*, a father goes to Spain to complete the pilgrimage to Camino de Santiago that his estranged son began and died on the first day. Think about how this father and estranged son might be like Jesus and his family.

WHAT is important to know?

Jesus' family serves as a literary tool to introduce several key themes. The antecedent of the pronoun translated as "people" (v. 21) in the NRSV is unclear, and probably indicates Jesus' family as the ones who were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." "Out of his mind" is literally, "he has stood outside." (Compare today's idiom, "he is really out of it," or the RSV "beside himself.") The question of who is *outside* arises again and again. In verse 31 the family is standing outside, in contrast to their saying in verse 21 that he "has gone outside," that is, out of his mind. (*Judith Hoch Wray*)

- ✪ What was the basis for the criticism of Jesus' family about Jesus? Of the religious leaders?
- ✪ What do you think Jesus meant when he looked at those around him and called them his mother and brothers?
- ✪ What did you learn about the setting of Jesus' early ministry from this passage?

WHERE is God in these words?

If we transpose this theological vision into our own time, instead of lepers and demoniacs crowding around Jesus, we might see the strange bodies of the disabled. The only ones not in the picture, the ones not pressing in at the doors and windows, desperate and aching to be near Jesus, are the ones who think they know what religion and family life is supposed to look like. Jesus, infinitely patient with the crowd, blasts away at these people. Everyone will be forgiven, except people who blaspheme the Holy Spirit. The inability to tell the difference between the power of the Holy Spirit and the demonic is an *unforgivable sin*. (*Wendy Farley*)

- ✪ What does it mean to "blaspheme" (NRSV) or "insult" (CEB) the Holy Spirit?
- ✪ Why would this be the only unforgivable sin?
- ✪ What can you surmise from Jesus' words about one's relationship with God?

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

For us, however, the issue is how we now understand the relationship between discipleship and Christology. More than simply "understand" intellectually, it seems crucial for the churches today to seek to live out that understanding. Living out the form of discipleship Christ bids us follow means a new solidarity with all of humanity. It requires that we learn with him to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice. It asks us to live into the densities of human joy and suffering. It calls us to find ourselves precisely in our willingness to give up our self-absorption. This is a demanding task, requiring a willingness to follow him into a new solidarity with God's whole family. (*Don E. Saliers*)

- ✪ Has there been a time when you were criticized because of your faith? What was your reaction?
- ✪ What does this story tell about being more like Jesus? What are ways we can be more like Jesus?
- ✪ What in this passage suggests how we should view Satan? How might Satan be disguised today?

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

We should look for the reality signified by the name "Satan." Satan does not necessarily mean a personality with horns and a red tail, but it does name a demonic power that is actively engaged against the compassionate and reconciling love of God. This is the reality that Jesus names here, and whether we believe in a person named "Satan" is not as important as hearing about our captivity to the powers of evil signified by "Satan," powers that continue to seek our allegiance. (*Nibs Stroupe*)

- ✪ Jesus kept company with people his family and religious leaders considered undesirable. Why?
- ✪ What should we learn from how Jesus interacted with the people in this story?
- ✪ What do Jesus' words suggest about conflicting allegiances and our discipleship?

Holy God, help us understand how to follow Jesus and keep our priorities according to your will. Amen.