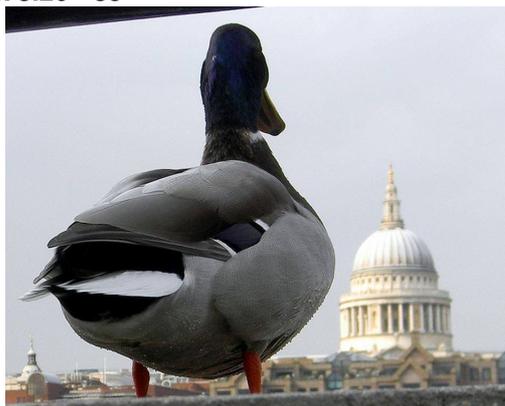


## IS JESUS MAD OR ARE WE? Mark 3.20 - 35



Jesus wasn't the sort of prophet Jewish people were used to and he certainly was not the sort of messiah they were hoping for. His family thought he was 'out of his mind'. The religious scholars claimed he was evil. Today we find him in a seaside Capernaum home and people are crowded in. Mark records that there's no time or space to eat. Jesus' friends come to rescue him, by force if necessary. He's getting far too carried away now.

The 'church heavies' appear having spread rumours that he is 'off his head'. Jesus had healed many people of mental and physical ills and they are very suspicious of this 'wonder worker'. They accuse him of operating with the Devil – or Beelzebub - a name meaning ruler of the demons. Jesus mounts a spirited defense.

'How can Satan cast out Satan?' For Satan to oppose himself would be self destructive. Jesus is saying that everything that is evil, negative and wrong, including sickness, has its source in Satan. And by inference, God alone is the source of all that is good, positive and right. Jesus is saying, 'How can anyone accomplish good ends by evil means?' Evil will always produce evil. Ends do not justify means.

He continues to drive the point home. 'Do you think it's possible to enter the house of an able bodied man, and walk off with his possessions unless you tie him up first?' In other words, if we are with God we cannot be 'taken for a ride'. So, in order to heal others Jesus must first overcome the negative forces that have led to these sicknesses. May I reaffirm that God does not send bad things to anyone? God is love. God is good. It is against God's nature to have any truck with evil. We know that this power of evil is present in our world. Daily we make our choices in every aspect of life to journey with that which is life giving or choose those pathways which bring inner and outer destruction.

Jesus links these foreboding images with the redemptive word **forgiveness**. This is a fundamental Christian truth. Forgiveness is essential to our lives. It is pure unadulterated grace. The question arises, 'Is there a sin which is unforgivable?' We can be forgiven, not only for sins against others, but against God.

While it was apparent to most people that Jesus was doing good works by the power of God, the religious ones refused to see it. They subverted the truth by

saying that Jesus did his work by demonic power. They rejected the one who could have brought them forgiveness. They not only failed to see the light but called the light darkness. The sin that is unforgivable, according to Mark, is the sin of refusing forgiveness. The NT tells of *no one* repenting and seeking forgiveness unsuccessfully.

The scene in the house is interrupted by the arrival of Jesus' family – his mother and his brothers. They're really worried. Word has reached them from far away that Jesus is going 'beyond the pale'. They've come to get him and take him home to care for him. They stand outside – there's no room for them but someone says, 'Rabbi, your family are outside looking for you.' That doesn't draw the response they expect. Straight to the point Jesus says, 'Who do you think my mother and my brothers are?' (Help! Don't speak like this about your family, Jesus, you'll dig yourself in deeper.)

Jesus looks around the crowd inside and says, 'You are *all* my family.' For Jesus, 'obedience is thicker than blood'. The one who obeys God's will is my family.'

At this moment Jesus has expanded the concept of family. How do we react?

Are we always inclusive in our lives? Do we embrace, not just nod, to all those in our church family, all in our local Christian community, those who seek God from other faiths, those who are 'on the edge' – the young rebels, and the old stooges and middle age comfort seekers? Jesus calls us to 'hug' them in thought and action. Within our community, we are the family of 'whoever does the will of God.' The barriers to our true discipleship have nothing to do with physical impairment, old age or even cynicism. The barriers are connected with our inner perception. Jesus said, 'Having eyes, do you not see? Having ears can you not hear?' For Jesus 'obedience is thicker than blood'.

Was Jesus mad? As CS Lewis wrote, 'Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman.' Was Jesus different? Sure. It wasn't so much that Jesus was 'out of his mind' but into the realities of everyday 'loving God and loving everyone else'. Sure, he thought differently from what was the accepted culture. Why? He was always in touch with his Heavenly Father. He elevated women and children. He took on the religious heavies. He healed the poor - those who had to beg for a living. He did more than the itinerant herbalists who travelled the country. Physical illness or disability was a social exclusion as was gender, race and culture. (A lot like today.) He turned imperial values of class upside down – the last, the lowest and the least were his priority. Jesus linked healing with faith. This is Jesus' only fee, if you like. And how much faith? A tiny little seed is still enough.

Was Jesus mad and therefore are we? I believe that we need to be infected with more of this Messianic madness that seeks out our Good God and lives to enfold others in the sanity of love and service.

As St Paul wrote, 'Let this mind be in you that was also in Jesus Christ.' It all begins in the mind – pain happens in the brain. Jesus was the Son of God not a madman and he is here with us to forgive and heal. AMEN

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