

The title of today's message is: **The Agony and Joy of Family**

Jesus said: ***Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.***

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's text starts off with Jesus experiencing conflict within His physical family, because of what they saw Jesus do and heard Him say.

Mark tells us that Jesus' family arrived while He was debating with some very powerful people of the day, the teachers of the law.

Here Jesus was debating Satan, the prince of demons, when someone told Him that His mother and brothers were at the door looking for Him.

And much to everyone's surprise, Jesus said, ***"Who are my mother and my brothers?"... "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."***

Naturally this caused tension in the air, not only because of the debate, but also for what seemed to be a conflict within Jesus' own family.

Jesus knew the agony of family life, but He also knew that there's joy. Joy that allows us to face the conflicts of family life.

Jesus' family knew this joy very well, they had experienced it at the time of His birth.

You and I, even proclaim this joy during Christmas each year, when we sing "Joy To The World".

And a Lutheran theologian lifted high the importance of family joys and family values in our time during a pastor's conference.

He said; "How do you overcome the sorrowful world and sinful values of society today?"

He then answered his own question by saying, "Tell family stories and Bible stories over and over again." That should do it he said!

Then he said; "Don't be surprised when conflict arises even in the best of families.

He said; remember the Bible story of Adam's great fall described in today's first lesson, Genesis chapter 3.

Were to remember this because the physical family of today, is under the same curse that Adam and Eve were under.

Today were talking about conflict within the our families because of sin. That's right, the same sin that caused conflict within Jesus' earthly family.

In fact, members of Jesus' earthly family were so upset with Him, that they plotted to take charge of Him.

They even said that He was out of His mind, and that He had become just another one of those religious fanatics. Not even they believed.

All because Jesus was preaching about the kingdom of God, and at the same time debating Satan with the teachers of the law.

It appeared that the conflict within Jesus' earthly family was so extreme that His mother and brothers wanted to quietly put Jesus away.

But what caused the most blessed family of all time, to have conflict within it. It sure looks like it was sin as well that caused this conflict.

Sin that came in the way of three issues. There was the issues of "Security, Safety and Social Values"

You see, as for security, Jesus' family members thought and believed, that Jesus threw away His security, and that of His family.

On the day He left home, and began His ministry it affected the financial security of his earthly family, because Jesus was the eldest son.

And in Jewish culture, the eldest son was responsible for the financial security of the family. Instead, Jesus went off to be a traveling preacher.

A profession with no security at all for Him, or for His family. The family saw this as an act of an irresponsible man.

Then there was the Safety issue. The family was concerned about Jesus' safety as well as their own.

Most people or families, play it safe, you know, don't tempt fate. And it was no different with Jesus' earthly family.

It was common knowledge that no sensible man, would deliberately agitate the religious leaders, they had the power to silence you forever.

And Jesus' earthly family couldn't see how He could win a battle with the religious leaders. So they feared for His life and theirs.

And sure enough, the conflict rose to a fiery level, they accused Jesus of being possessed by Satan.

They said; ***"He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."***

Finally, the family was concerned about Jesus' teaching, which was challenging the social values of the day.

Jesus was in affect changing the rules, He was tearing down the social values of old which Moses put in place.

He was proclaiming the social values of a new society, which was the kingdom of God.

Now according to Luke chapter 4, the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders went from bad to worse, as Jesus returned to Nazareth.

Luke said; ***And on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.***

Unrolling it He said in part, ***"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."***

He then handed back the scroll, sat down, and said: ***"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."***

Everyone in the synagogue became furious when they heard Jesus say this. They accused Him of committing blasphemy.

So they drove Jesus out of the synagogue and out of town, to a cliff on the edge of a hill. Pushing forward they tried to cause Jesus to fall off the cliff.

But Jesus simply walked right through the crowd and went on His way, untouched.

Like the men in the synagogue, family members are always judging others in the family, even to the point of hating their own flesh and blood.

There's a story about a woman who suffered greatly, as she was tortured in a Nazi prison camp during WWII.

She said her suffering was excruciating and that it was nothing short of a miracle that she even survived.

A short time later, after she and other Jews were liberated, she met and married an American soldier and settled down to a happy life here in the U.S.

She was finally able to experience some joy in her life. The joy of her husband and the birth of a child.

But she said, I also experienced pain like I had never experienced before when her husband of 24 years divorced her.

The divorce from her husband had caused her more pain than she had ever suffered as a prisoner.

Its when sin enters the family that joy can turn into pain causing conflict within the family.

Separation or divorce, between spouses, children, brothers and sisters, and other family members.

That can, and most likely will, cause many painful problems leaving us to wonder how we can go on.

However some people deal with painful family problems by avoiding the conflict altogether. Of course this doesn't work, does it?

When problems are held inside a person, they come out in other ways, like blaming others for all their sadness.

But what God expects to see in us, when these tensions and conflicts come to the family, is a loving resolution.

Where all members of the family, experiencing joy once again, through true repentance and genuine forgiveness.

Jesus said; ***"Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."***

Now, to understand what Jesus meant by this, we have to look at another difficult verse in our text.

Its one of those verses which at first glance, seems to confuse the situation even more.

Jesus said: ***But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin."***

Waite a minute! Lets see, If we lie, and repent, were forgiven. If we dishonor one another, and repent, were forgiven.

If we hurt one another, and repent, were forgiven. And if we hurt God, and repent, were forgiven.

But if we commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit were not forgiven? Well how do we commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit anyway?

For the answer, we need to understand the nature or job, of the Holy Spirit. which is to bring us to repentance and reconciliation, and to the point where we're willing to forgive and to be forgiven.

So to blaspheme the Holy Spirit, is to cling to our own sinfulness and to be unwilling to forgive and to be forgiven.

Look God's will is that we all repent and be forgiven, its what brings Joy and reconciliation to all the family members.

And it's the same reconciliation that came to Jesus' earthly family members at the time of His crucifixion and resurrection.

And when the eleven disciples returned to Jerusalem, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying and they too repented.

They realized their sin, and joined together in prayer. And among them were the women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.

It was by and through the power of the resurrected Lord that they too found great joy.

Conflict will always raise its ugly head within our families from time to time because we live in a world of sin.

Yet there's hope and joy, to be found within our families if only we include in our deliberations, the help of Holy Spirit to learn to forgive.

Its God's will that we offer forgiveness to those who sin against us. To do otherwise may cause us to commit the unforgivable sin.

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.