

Meditation: Mark 3:31-35

Sermon Title: Blessed Mother

Scripture Introduction: Would you like to hear from God? If God spoke to you, would you listen to what he has to say? God has spoken to prophets. And those prophets have spoken on behalf of God and verified that what they say is true by miracles. Not pagan miracles like a faked healing service, a magic show, or a psychic reading, real public miracles. Not everyday miracles like a child being born, or a sinner saved, or car crash survived, real public miracles.

Jesus was a prophet and he spoke God's word. But there was one curious difference between Jesus and all the other true prophets who had gone before. True prophets would say "Thus says the Lord..." but Jesus said "Truly, I say to you..." Jesus was tacitly claiming to be God. Jesus was quietly revealing himself to be God to those who had ears to hear.

So what were some of the miracles Jesus did? Well, just before the passage we're about to read: Luke 11: 27-28 Jesus had healed a mute man. The man had been unable to speak and when Jesus exorcised the demon, the man was able to speak again.

And the response to this miracle is very interesting. No one claims that Jesus is doing a magic trick. No one puts forward the hypothesis that this mute man was only pretending to be mute for the sake of Jesus' magic trick. Jesus opponents don't claim that. Neither do they claim that the muteness was just a small psych issue and Jesus probably did some emergency counseling. No, Jesus most militant opponents tacitly verify that Jesus did miracles. What the Pharisees said in response was: Jesus is casting out demons by the prince of demons.

In Mark and Matthew the story of Jesus being accused of demonic power is followed by the story of Jesus' mother and brothers coming to see him. In Luke, he records the story of Jesus mother and brothers earlier on in chapter 8 verse 19 and following. (It's at the beginning of your bulletin.) I don't think the conversation about Jesus mother and brothers happened twice. Therefore I believe the conversation about Jesus mother and brothers happened

chronologically at around the same time as Luke 11: 27-28. So, we should understand these two passages as interpreting one another. Jesus said "My mother and brothers are the ones who hear the word of God and do it." Jesus is teaching that spiritual relation to him is more important than physical relation to him.

Prayer of Illumination:

Scripture Reading: Luke 11:27-28

Prayer of Illumination:

Introduction: Mother's day is complicated. As a guy growing up I used to dismiss mother's day as one of those holidays wherein I don't get presents. As I got a little older I realized this was a great day to appreciate my mom who did so many things for my siblings and that we didn't thank her for on a regular basis. Once I became a Christian, I took the day to thank several women who had been spiritual mothers to me in addition to my mom. After I got married I came to realize that this would be a day wherein I would also be appreciating my mother in law whether I liked it or not. Of course I do like to appreciate my mother in law. Once Annie and I started trying to have children we experienced a mother's day without children and feared we might never be able to have children. Then came a joyous mother's day wherein I needed to honor my mother, my spiritual mothers, my mother-in-law, and now the mother of my children. Then came a mother's day tinged with sadness because we were intimately aware of friends who had had children that died that year. And we grieved with them and put our hope in a covenant keeping, merciful God to carry us through the sadness.

If you came in the front doors of the church today perhaps you noticed an elegant crepe myrtle. That tree was planted in memory of a child of this church who died in the womb. Mother's day is a good day to remember covenant children who have died and to put our trust in a gracious God who saves even sinners like us.

We've prayed through several mother's days which were acutely sad because children had walked away from the Lord. And we have rejoiced and do rejoice

again at those that the Lord has already brought back and look in faith to the day when God will bring still others back to himself.

There are mothers in our midst who have given children up for adoption. And there are mothers in our midst who have adopted. Each mother's day they acutely remember the joy and the sadness of that adoption and they know that no matter where that child is, Jesus is the good shepherd.

We have in our midst stepmoms, single moms, pregnant moms, emptynester moms, and grandmothers who are filling in as moms again. In all these situations we really want to appreciate moms and congratulate moms but also come with a word of caution.

Overcoming all the pain and suffering and trial of childrearing and experiencing all the joys and satisfactions of parenting can tempt one to think that parenting rightly is where happiness comes from.

Fallen Condition Focus: We can be tempted to think that blessedness comes from our earthly relations. We can think that happiness comes from marriage, children, or parents. None of those is the source of true joy. We can subconsciously think that we'll be happy if our spouse is great, wise, powerful, popular; if our children are great, wise, powerful, popular. That is not where true blessedness is to be found. Our passage today tells us where true blessedness is to be found. How can a mother be truly blessed?

Proposition: Blessedness comes through listening to and obeying God's word. A truly blessed mother is one who listens to and obeys the word of God.

Let's look to our text to see how Luke proves this point.

As he said these things...

Jesus had been teaching that he was able to cast out demons because he had overcome Beelzebul. (The Greek reads Beelzebul, lord of the house, but it was changed in the vulgate either intentionally or unintentionally to Beelzebub, lord of dung.) The Pharisees (cf. Matthew 12) had outrageously claimed that Jesus was casting out demons by the power and authority of Beelzebul. The Pharisees were

saying that Jesus was Satan. And instead of incinerating them on the spot, Jesus reasons with them. Why would Beelzebul fight himself and his own minions? That doesn't make sense. And if you're saying, Pharisees, that anybody who casts out a demon does so because of demonic authority, then Pharisees who cast out demons do so on demonic authority. That also is not a consistent argument. Jesus asserts that he casts out demons because he's overcome the prince of demons. And Jesus had overcome the prince of demons' temptation in the wilderness. Thereafter demons don't fight Jesus, they unquestionably submit to him.

Jesus had demonstrated his power over demons by casting out a demon that was afflicting someone with muteness. After Jesus cast out the demon, the man was able to speak again. Because the Pharisees don't dispute the veracity of the miracle, they dispute the motivations of the miracle. Jesus rebukes them. Then Jesus warns about the danger of exorcising one demon only to have seven take its place. Then this woman shouts out from the crowd.

Who is this woman?

She's a follower of Jesus. Whether she came with the Pharisees party and was awed by Jesus teaching or whether she came specifically to hear Jesus teaching we'll never know this side of heaven. Perhaps it was her husband or son who had the demon. We don't know. But we do know she shouts out to Jesus. What kind of person shouts out to a celebrity/teacher/healer in the middle of a crowd? She speaks kindly. But she seems kind of loud, impetuous. She's not asking for teaching from the teacher. She's not asking for healing. She's not repeating something she's learned from Jesus. She's complimenting Jesus. In her defense, it probably wouldn't have been possible to take Jesus aside and say this to him personally so she had to capitalize on a moment of relative quiet to shout out her acclamation of Jesus. She's explicit. She's unfiltered. She reveals what she values as she shouts to Jesus. I can relate to this woman.

Way back in 1997 I went to a U2 concert in DC. We were sitting 6 rows away from part of the stage, it was still light out and relatively quiet before U2 came on to perform. All of sudden, 6 rows away I spotted a celebrity and her bodyguard. This celebrity had been getting a lot of bad press lately and I thought people were

being overly mean so I just thought I would take advantage of the moment to shout out my encouragement to the lady. Either no one else had noticed her or they had and were kindly giving her peace and quiet. It was into this moment I decided to stand up and shout to her, "I love you, Chelsea Clinton." And she gazed at me for a moment as if to say, "You just blew my chances to anonymously watch this concert."

So...

This woman in Luke didn't say "I love you." She said, "blessed is the womb that bore you." In order to figure out what she's saying we need know what 'blessed' means and how she's using it.

What does blessed mean? In the Greek, the word is makaria and when it's in reference to a person it means happy, joyful, favored, graced, lucky. This isn't the first woman in the gospels to call Mary blessed. Mary, upon hearing that she will bear Jesus says that all generations will call her blessed Luke 1:48. Elizabeth upon encountering her Messiah's mother says "Blessed are you (Mary) among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb." The woman is using metonymy, using a part to refer to the whole, to say that Mary is blessed. And rightly does this unnamed woman say that Mary is blessed, favored of the Lord, because that idea is echoed in other places in the scripture. Mary was blessed not only to have a great son, but to bear the son of the most high. Was Mary happy about this? Mary herself says, "My heart rejoices in God my savior." She is joyous that she has a savior and that she gets to bear him. She is blessed.

Who is the woman complimenting Jesus or his mother?

Jesus mother could be in attendance or just outside and so the woman shouting out could be intending for the compliment to go to Mary even though she's speaking to Jesus. But here's where it gets muddled. When someone says to you "Boy, you've got really great kids." Who are they complimenting? When someone says to you, "Boy, you must have had really great parents." What are they saying? In each of these instances someone is complimenting you. This woman is complimenting Jesus.

But she's also revealing something about how we think and she offers a clue into what our idolatries might be. We sometimes think in this way: If there's a problem with the child there's a problem with the parent. If the parents really lack self-control we don't have too much hope for the children to magically display self-control on their own. If we see a well-behaved child we're tempted to think, I bet that child has an invested parent or two behind her. But this view of parenting is an oversimplification. Let's just do away with it right now. As a parent one can hear God's word and obey it but your child might disown you and the faith. As a child you are not doomed to repeat your parent's sins. Salvation is all of grace. The terrifying and comforting truth is this: if you are blessed with a child who hears God's word and obeys it, that came about by grace. And if you have a child who rejects Jesus, that too was part of God's sovereign plan.

Let's take a look at Mary and Jesus for example. Was it because Mary was so great that her child turned out to be perfect? No. Mary was a sinner in need of salvation. That's why she cries out in the magnificat "My soul rejoices in God my savior." Mary's identity and salvation don't come from her giving birth to God. Mary's identity and salvation come through God giving birth to her, new birth as she is regenerated by believing in her son as her savior.

That's where every mother's salvation and worth comes from. It's not from having good kids, or even having kids at all, our identity, worth, and salvation all comes from our spiritual relationship to Jesus. The spiritual relationship to Jesus is more important than the physical relationship to Jesus.

In our meditation this morning, we were reminded that Jesus says his mother and brothers are those that do the will of God. Jesus' physical family at this point in the gospels thought he was out of his mind. Mark 3:21 This is mind boggling! His brothers were coming to arrest him! the Greek word is *Krataysai*, it's the same thing the guards did to Jesus in the garden of gethsemane, they arrested him. Jesus own family! On top of that, you've got John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin who surely knew about the virgin birth of Jesus from his mother Elizabeth who sends his disciples to Jesus to ask him if he's the Messiah or should they wait for

another. Really! Blood relation is not the strongest tie in the universe. The blood of Christ is the strongest tie in the universe.

From Canada to Chile, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, from Nepal to Baltimore believers in Christ are united in prayer for one another not because they're related but because they are united in Christ. Christians have voluntarily covenanted themselves to one another so that when one part suffers all suffer. When one part is weak, the rest give. This is the covenant family and it is far stronger, better, vaster, broader than any blood relation.

You see, for some people the good news is this: if you work hard, love your spouse, discipline your children, God will bless you. That is not the gospel! Others say the good news is this: you don't need to work hard, you don't need to be married, you don't need to have kids to be happy. That's not the good news either! The good news is that Jesus did the will of his Father in heaven, perfectly. He heard the word of God and kept it, perfectly. And then he was killed like a notorious criminal in our place. If we listen to the word of God, we find that we can be united with Christ by believing that he is the way and trusting him for our salvation. In so doing, we do the will of God in heaven. According to 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance."

Back to the text at hand, this well meaning woman compliments Jesus and compliments Jesus' mother while she's at it. Why doesn't Jesus just say, "Amen?" A simple "Thank you," would suffice Lord. But no, Jesus has to use it as a teachable moment. Jesus has this lady's attention. She has just revealed that she highly esteems his mother because she gave birth to Jesus, nursed Jesus and reared Jesus. So Jesus takes the moment to teach this woman what she should really be focusing her attentions on, where she should really be exerting her energies, focusing her meditations, not on mothering per se, but on obeying.

Jesus says blessed is the one who listens to the word of God and keeps it.

What does it mean to listen? (silence) First, one needs to be quiet. Not shouting out. Second, it means pressing pause on your own thoughts, values, ideas of

happiness, and listening to someone else's ideas. Now, Jesus doesn't leave it at "Just listen." He says specifically what to listen to. Not the wisdom of the ancestors, not TED talks, not mommyblogs, not celebrity Christians. He says listen to the word of God. Those other things are fine to listen to but the main thing you need to listen to is the word of God. Do we have any room for the word of God in our schedules? Do we make room to sit and listen, stand and listen, walk and listen to the word of God. Of course one can read the word of God but there's something especially blessed about hearing the word of God. Read it aloud in your homes. Stop what you're doing or rise from your sleeping to listen to God's word.

Heads of households, you should be doing the reading out loud in your home of God's word. And you should be making it a priority, as you have today, to bring your family to listen to God's word preached. That is the context wherein Christ was speaking. He had been preaching. And he says to the one who speaks, listen.

The word of God. What is the word of God? Jesus would have been referring to the Old Testament. For us the word of God is the Old and New Testaments. The Bible. Listen to the Bible, that's where true blessedness, true happiness comes from. A heart that is intent on listening to the Lord and responding in faith. But as we listen to God's word what do we hear. You know. The Lord has placed his holy spirit inside your hearts and you have heard already from God's word, "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church." "Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord." "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child but the rod of discipline drives it far from him." Proverbs 22:15 "Father's do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord." "Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right." Eph. 6:1

The story of Martin...

How do we keep God's word? We treat the meaning of God's word as precious. We memorize God's word. We struggle to adhere to what God's word says. To keep God's word means to strive to obey what God says in his word for us to do.

Conclusion: The problem is, we don't keep God's word. Who then is blessed if no one truly keeps God's word? Who could possibly, honestly, keep God's word? Is no one truly blessed? Who is Jesus even talking about? He's talking about himself. He is God's word but he also listened to God's word. Remember how the teachers of the law were amazed at his understanding as a boy when he came to the temple. He keeps God's word. He makes the rules but he chose to submit himself to them perfectly. Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Jesus is the one, the only one, who has kept God's word. Even when that word was, Suffer. Jesus has kept God's word even when that word was, Die. Jesus has kept God's word even when that word was, Drink the cup of the Father's wrath. Jesus kept the word. So he is truly blessed. "Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus, thou hast loved us, love us still." True blessing comes from being united to that most blessed one, Jesus.

So a blessed mother, a blessed father, a blessed son, a blessed daughter is blessed by her or his union with Christ. Not by our earthly relations. Not by our works of righteousness. We are blessed as we are joined with that blessed one, Jesus. How are we joined with him? By joining his body, the local church, you join yourself to the Lord. Therefore let us walk in blessing, joy and happiness as we walk in union with the body of Christ. amen.