

Who is my family?

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In Jesus' day—as in ours--redefining the family is a provocative act with far-reaching social, political, moral and spiritual implications. If we were to isolate Jesus in Mark 3 from the moments in the other gospels in which Jesus interacts with his family, we might conclude this story with George Aichele's sharply worded assertion, "Mark's Jesus is no supporter of family values!"

But rather than focusing on how to define the nuclear family--something that scripture addresses more constructively in other passages--this text from Mark draws our attention toward the new family that God creates in the church, and it prompts us to consider the far-reaching implications of redefining the family around membership in a new community.

I grew up in Pentecostal congregations that persistently used the language of the New Testament in its daily life. This resulted in some strange expressions, especially since the King James Version of the Bible was so dominant. (I remember puzzling over why Jesus summoned children to himself with the words "suffer the little children.")

One of the oddities for which I am increasingly thankful, however, was the way in which "brother" and "sister" were ubiquitous titles in church. The way we talked assumed that we were all family, and that we shared a common birth in the Holy Spirit.

At a time of charged political rhetoric about defining the family, Mark 3:20-35 invites its hearers to reflect on the contours of the family to which God's people belong. If

we keep in mind the twin emphases of Jesus' teaching about his family--that they are those who come to him (in recognition of his lordship) and who do the will of the God (in submission to God's calling to follow and obey)--then several questions arise:

- What are the social, political, moral and spiritual implications of being in Jesus' family?
- Of having brothers and sisters with whom we sharply disagree?
- Of having brothers and sisters across the globe?
- What are some concrete ways we could more fully relate to the family that God has made us a part of?

One way to begin exploring answers to such questions might be to start using the New Testament's language in our churches: "brother," "sister," "mother." We may be surprised at the transformative power and far-reaching implications of such a simple practice.