



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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My Mother and My Brothers

Luke 8:16-25

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Imagine a conference room. Around the table are seated high-level businessmen ready to decide the fate of a major corporation with all sorts of ramifications for hundreds of thousands or maybe even millions of workers and customers. Or maybe the men are heads of state and ministers from a group of nations negotiating an arms pact to keep a tenuous peace or a major economic treaty that will, again, effect the lives of millions of people. The chairman is in the middle of an important presentation when a secretary slips into the room and up to the chairman, interrupts him and whispers something in his hear. He turns to all these important men and explains that something *very* important has come up and asks them to excuse him while he takes a phone call. He leaves them sitting around the table for ten minutes as they wonder what could possibly so important that it could justify interrupting their meeting. When the chairman comes back he's smiling and explains that it was his wife and son on the phone. His son had a big exam and had been worried about it for weeks, but he just found out that he'd passed—and not only passed, but done extremely well. Of course, the other men around the table just sit in disbelief: "You interrupted this important meeting to take a call from your kid?"

On one hand we're probably impressed that this man put his family first, but on the other we're also probably thinking that this man should have called his son back when there was a scheduled break in the meeting. In our culture this just isn't the way we do things. We don't stop important business or government meetings to take calls from our kids.

Think about that as we come back to Luke 8. This chapter of the Gospel is about *response* and specifically about

how we respond to the proclamation of God's "good news" and about how we respond to Jesus as Messiah and as Lord. Luke introduced the chapter with a short note about the people following Jesus and made the point that they had given up everything to follow him. They sacrificed their lives and careers, their money and property, and even their reputations because they knew that the only proper response to Jesus was to *centre* their lives on him in faith. They knew that the only proper response to the grace that flowed through him was to respond with loving gratitude by giving him *everything*.

And that response stands in stark contrast to the response of Israel to the proclamation of God's word. The parable of the Sower was a summary of Israel's history of responding to the word of the Lord. The Lord spoke through Moses, giving his law, and the people said: "All this we will do!" But when trials came that commitment and that faith shrivelled up like new plants with no roots. God spoke through the prophets, calling the people back to himself, but like seed scattered amongst thorns, the desire for prosperity, the desire for earthly security, and commitments to pagan gods choked out God's Word. But now in Jesus, God's Word has become incarnate. He speaks and people are beginning to hear and to respond in faith—and they're bearing fruit. Think about this was we read Jesus next parable in verses 16-18.

"No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."

Actually, as it turns out, some people *do* cover a lamp with a jar and some people *do* hide it under a bed. God had lit a lamp. He had chosen Abraham and his children to be a means of blessing to the nations—a light to the gentiles. But as we've seen, Israel rejected his Word

over and over and over. She was to be a witness to the nations of what it was like to be God's people and to live with his blessing, but instead through the prophets, the Lord rebuked her: "Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" (Joel 2:17). The Lord had given them a light and they kept it to themselves and hid it from the world. They put the light under a jar; they hid it under the bed, when the Lord had intended them to hang it in the foyer, in the vestibule of the house to welcome guests in from *outside*. That's the point of God's Word. In Genesis, in the story of the Tower of Babel, we see how the people of the world lost all knowledge of their Creator. They fell into paganism, worshipping nature and worshipping gods of their own creation, trying to manipulate those gods to give them the things they wanted. And so God spoke and called Abraham. Through Abraham his Word came to humanity again so that we might recover knowledge of our Creator and eventually be restored to his fellowship. And then Abraham's children hid the light. They kept it to themselves—they turned off the porchlight and told the outsiders that they weren't welcome.

But as Jesus says here, those things that were hidden will be made known and the things kept secret will come to light. That's why he came. That's his mission. What Israel hid under the bed, Jesus will put back in the foyer. He's come to fulfil God's plan and to do what Israel had failed to do. He's come to turn the porchlight back on; he's come to shine the light of God and to speak the Word of the Lord so that the nations will see and hear the good news. He's come to welcome in the outsiders.

And in that there's a warning. Again, Chapter 8 is about hearing and responding. Jesus says in verse 18: "Take care then how you hear." "To the one who has, more will be given." If you hear and receive the Word, responding to it in faith as these people we've seen completely reorienting their lives around Jesus, more will be given. Those are encouraging words. But the next are words of warning: "From the one who has not, even what he thinks he has will be taken away." Israel was full of people who had God's Word, who

had his light, but they'd responded by hiding it under the bed. They hadn't responded to it. Instead they kept it as a symbol of special status and as a way to keep outsiders on the outside, out of the house, out of the kingdom. They'd used the Word to do the exact opposite of what it was given for. And so Jesus warns "You think you've got everything, but you've missed the point entirely. If you don't respond the way my followers have, the way these people have given their all to follow me, I will take away everything. Jesus is giving the same warning that John the Baptist had given back in Chapter 3:

Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Luke 3:8-9)

God lit the lamp and he won't allow it to remain hidden forever. His people failed. They ended up in exile as a result. But where they failed, he sent his Word one final time. His Word became incarnate in Jesus, became the seed of Abraham, and this time he will fulfil the mission and carry the light of God's good news to entire world. The old tree will be cut down because it failed to produce fruit, but one branch will be left: Jesus himself. He has become Israel and through him the tree will grow and thrive again as the nations are grafted into him.

This gives a sense of what it means to follow Jesus. It gives a sense of what matters and doesn't matter. If the old tree of is being cut down because it hasn't borne any fruit, why should anyone be attached to it? Jesus, the single living branch, the one branch that is bearing fruit, is what matters—all that matters. He's the vine; we're the branches. He's the head; we're the body. He is true and faithful Israel and we're the children God promised to raise up for Abraham from the stones. That's the family we belong to. Through faith we're all brothers and

sisters of Jesus and because of that God is our Father. And with that in mind we can make sense of what Jesus says next. Look at verses 19 and 20:

Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you." But he answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

It's all about family. Think again about the businessman or the prime minister interrupting the meeting to take that call from his son. He knew which "family" was ultimately the most important even though making the choice upset the people around him. Following Jesus is all about family too. But Jesus is making a new family. Remember what happened when he preached to his family and friends in Nazareth. They saw his miracles and wanted him to stay in Nazareth to be their personal miracle-worker. They wanted to hide the lamp under the bed. But Jesus came to take the Word and to take the light to the nations. And when he made it clear what he was about, the people there—presumably included some of his own relatives—tried to throw him off a cliff. They heard, but they didn't respond in faith. And so now, as his mothers and brothers come to see him (Mark tells us in his parallel account that they were concerned Jesus had lost his mind) Jesus uses them as an object lesson. They represent the old family, the old tree, the natural offspring and family of Abraham—the dead wood that refuses to bear fruit no matter how loudly God speaks to it.

In contrast, Jesus' real family is made up all those who have heard the Word and "do it"—it's made up all those who have found their identity, found forgiveness, found healing in Jesus and have given up everything to reorient their lives around him. Jesus' family is made up of the people to whom God has given his light and who are ready to carry it to the nations instead of hiding it under the bed and instead of keeping it

to themselves as a sign of special privilege.

We'll see Jesus make this point again. In Luke 11:27-28 we read:

As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

And in 9:59-60:

To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Mary was certainly blessed to be the mother of God Incarnate, but Jesus makes the point that even more blessed are those who hear the word and keep it—who respond in faith. Even in our culture where we sit much more loosely with family obligations we still get a sense of how powerful Jesus' statements about family are. If there was any family obligation greater than all others it was looking after the dead, and yet Jesus even tells this man whose father has just died to leave the dead and instead to proclaim the kingdom—to follow Jesus. Jesus is calling people to himself and creating a new family and in light of that new and living family, the old, dead family is no longer of significance.

This complete shift in identity, commitment, and allegiance shows the radical nature of faith in Jesus. On the one hand it's a strong denouncement of Israel for her failure and her lack of both faith and fruit. She's the old family and Jesus is creating a new family. But it should be a powerful warning to us today. Jesus was saying these things to Jews. For them their entire identity was wrapped up in being the children and family of Abraham. If that was now irrelevant—and even something to turn their backs on as they followed Jesus and became a new family—what does it mean for us? Consider all the

attachment we have, not least of which is our own biological families. Jesus places a higher calling on us than our parents and siblings, then our employers, than our nation—than anything else. And we need to ask ourselves if we've made Jesus and his kingdom our *first* priority. Brothers and sisters—and I can say that because we are brothers and sisters *in Christ*—if we find that there are things in life that cause us to side-line Jesus and his kingdom, we may be hearing the Word of God, but we're not doing it. We may hide and feel secure for a time, but as Jesus says here, the hidden things will be made manifest. For Luke that meant that the events that unfold in the Gospel and in the Early Church—Jesus' death, his resurrection and ascension, the sending of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church, and eventually the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple—are the unveiling; they're the revelation of the hidden work that God was doing all along. They're the events that revealed who was truly listening and who was truly following. We have those things as an example, as a warning, and as an exhortation for us to hear and to do. And one day again everything we have hidden will be brought into the light.

Luke goes on to tell us about Jesus and his disciples getting into trouble on the Sea of Galilee in a little fishing boat. And the story is relevant because it's events like these that expose what we've hidden. It's events like these that cause—or *should* cause—us to think about whether we've trusted entirely in Jesus or whether we're still trusting in and following the things we should have left behind when we took up with Jesus. Look at verses 22-25:

One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they

ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?"

The Sea of Galilee is a large lake, but even being a lake, it was known for its fierce storms that would sometimes come up seemingly from nowhere. Fisherman, like some of Jesus' disciples, normally stayed close to shore, but Jesus wanted to get to the other side of the sea and they obliged. And then a storm came up. They knew just how dangerous the storm could be, which was why they normally stayed close to shore. You can imagine the men scrambling in their fear to bail water out of the boat, but there was Jesus—probably in the helmsman's seat, under cover in the back of the boat, sleeping peacefully. How could he sleep through the storm, through the tossing, and through the frantic bailing and shouting of his friends?

They woke him up. You have to wonder why. Maybe they had his miracles in mind. If he could raise the dead, he could calm a storm. And yet Jesus rebukes them for their lack of faith. Maybe they only woke him up because they were all getting ready to jump ship and didn't want to leave him behind. Whatever the case, Jesus stood and rebuke the storm. He rebuked it the same way he had rebuked demons. He commands the waters with a word the same way that the Lord had commanded the waters with his Word in creation: separating the waters above from the waters below and then parting the waters below to create land. For Jews the sea was a symbol of chaos and evil. It was a vestige of the earth in its uncreated state that the Lord, for some reason, permitted to exist. It was the home of Leviathan—the great sea monster whom only the Lord could command. And here, as the Creator had commanded the waters and as he had commanded Leviathan, Jesus commands and the sea becomes calm.

Is it any wonder that the disciples were afraid and wondered who it was who could command the wind and the water?

They knew that the Lord was the only one who could command such things. And now here was Jesus doing what they knew only the Lord could do. In the presence of Jesus, they were in the presence of the Lord, or at least his agent who shared his authority.

But the key is in Jesus rebuke: "Where is your faith?" The seed of God's Word had been sown in their hearts, but when the test came, their little shoots, their little saplings of faith were dried out by the sun and choked by the thorns. There they were, being led by the man who was lord over sin and death—remember it was his idea to sail across the Sea of Galilee that day—there they were with this amazing man and yet they panicked over a storm. Where was their faith? But brothers and sisters, we often do the same thing. Here we are, followers of the same God-man who is lord over sin and death, the same God-man whom we see in stories like this, calming the wind and waves, but when the tests and trials come we go into a panic: "Master, master, my life is over!" Friends, even if that time has come and the worst is about to happen—even if it's time for our lives to end—we need to come to the end of ourselves, we need to come to the end of our own resources, and trust in the one who is Lord of sin and death. We need to trust in the one who is Lord of all Creation. We need to continue to find our being in him, to follow him with everything we have and with undivided loyalties. If we can't trust the Lord of Creation, how foolish are we to trust in ourselves?

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, in our collect we asked for your defence and comfort in all dangers and adversities. We ask now that you would use those dangers and adversities as opportunities to grow our faith. Increase our faith and remind us that your defence and comfort are with us always and no matter what. Bring us to an end of ourselves and teach us to trust you in all things and above all things. Our faith and our loyalties are divided and we ask that, whatever it takes, you would give us a faith centred solely on the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask this through him. Amen.