

It's the privilege of those who don't study the Bible to have a lofty opinion of Jesus. Studying the Bible usually removes the sentimentality that ignorance casts over the real Jesus. When we carefully examine Jesus' life, ministry and teachings, when we take off the rose-colored glasses and take off those white gloves for daintily handling the Scriptures, we will find that Jesus doesn't always come out looking like a nice person. In fact at times he's frustrating and maddening. And I sometimes think one of the strangest things about Jesus' life, based on how he treated those close to him, is that he wasn't betrayed sooner.

Granted, Jesus does helpful, even miraculous, things like feeding the hungry, healing the sick, blessing the little children, yet he hangs out with prostitutes and members of the first century mafia. Jesus can be a somewhat grating person, dragging rocks across the church's clean polished floors.

The teachers of the law were so desperate to stop Jesus that they “demonized” him and his work. Did you catch that? They claim that he is driving out demons by the prince of demons—Beelzebub. When political opponents today want to get the upper hand they employ the same strategy. They “demonize” their opponents. People were and are shocked that when Jesus taught and healed he kept coming back to one central topic—forgiving. We're happy to include Jesus in God's forgiving, but we can skip right over the rest of his words. We don't really apprehend what he says about forgiving. He says that *everything* can be forgiven, which means that for Jesus' sake, God will forgive *any* sin.

Since Jesus says that all sins can be forgiven, we might as well start with a truly horrible one. The *New York Times* reported: The suspect in one of the deadliest school shootings in modern American history confessed to the police that he “began shooting students he saw in the hallways and on the school grounds,” according to a police report released the day after the shooting. The suspect, Nikolas Cruz, 19, carried a black duffel bag and backpack, where he hid loaded magazines, the report said. He arrived at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL in an Uber at 2:19 p.m. on February 14 and pulled out a semiautomatic AR-15 rifle, according to details described by the authorities at a news conference.

Jesus says that *all* can be forgiven—walk right through heaven's gates with all the other saints who from their labors rest. Jesus proclaims that child molesters and mass murderers, Nazi thugs or Stalin's police, suicide bombers—all these people can be forgiven. God waits with arms open wide to welcome them home. He says that the only sin that cannot be forgiven is repeatedly resisting him. Yet all else can be forgiven. The teachers of the law *resisted* him by *demonizing* him. In Jesus' day the religious officials were appalled because he did unseemly things from Friday night until sundown Saturday night.

Breaking the Jewish Sabbath isn't such a big deal to us, but do you remember what Jesus said when Peter asked him how often he should forgive? How does seven times sound? Jesus says “no” and starts teaching him the multiplication tables. If someone sins against you and asks forgiveness, you forgive, even if this idiot keeps doing it, 77 times. Have any of us come near to 77 times of forgiving the same person who commits the same sin against us? If anyone among us has done that, they would be a candidate for co-dependency deprogramming. And then, if we haven't forgiven as Jesus says we should, are we admitting that he's offensive to us, an embarrassment?

Jesus can be very entertaining. At least the crowds in his day understood his sarcastic humor. He makes people chuckle at the pretensions of religious leaders. Yet Jesus is a little like an eccentric uncle—a few hours around him is enough. He's interesting at first because he's so different from the rest of the family.

But after a while he wears you out. Look in our Scripture and see that his family and friends think he's crazy. When his family comes to drag him away from what he's doing, he won't admit that blood is thicker than water. The teachers of the law think that he's demon-possessed. If you look honestly at what he does and listen closely to what he says, you can see why.

He tells us to love our enemies; yet a colleague tells me that during WWII when pastors suggested doing that they were called Nazis; and in the Vietnam War era similar suggestions earned you the title Communist. Honestly, what do you think of a fellow who'd call his best friend "Satan," or who calls a woman with an ill child a dog, or who tells us that if we'd follow him we must hate our father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even our own life? No preacher with a brain would choose to preach that message on Mother's Day. I guarantee you.

If Jesus' cursing the fig tree or driving a herd of pigs into the sea or making a whip and chasing people out of the temple doesn't offend you, then do exactly what he says: "*Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.*" So it isn't too strange that people who meet Jesus in our story take offense at him and decide he's demon possessed.

Who is Jesus Christ? He is the founder of a new community. In Mark 3 Jesus takes his disciples up on a mountainside and creates a new community that would ultimately become the Church. In the Bible, mountaintops are typically places of revelation and new creation, and Mark 3 is no exception. This new community would eclipse all other communities and all other commitments Jesus' followers have made, including the blood ties of their families.

Jesus makes it clear that important though our families of origin are, they must not get in the way of the more important bonds we share as co-disciples of Christ. That becomes all the more poignant in Mark 3, because Jesus' mother and brothers have apparently not yet signed on as members of Jesus' band of disciples. They have been following Jesus in a Facebook sort of way, but not in the deeper way. It looks like they have followed Jesus to check up on him, to find out what he has been up to. As a result, they come to a dire conclusion: *Jesus is off his rocker!* He has become something of an embarrassment. They want to whisk Jesus out of sight, keep him quiet for a while, and then see if all this talk about casting out demons and the kingdom of his Father goes away.

The true humanity of Jesus is on shining display in this gospel account from Mark. How human is Jesus? He is so human that those closest to him could not quite accept that he was also the eternal Son of God. Additionally, Jesus' true humanity must have meant that his feelings were hurt when his own flesh and blood turned on him. Let's not make Jesus so divinely serene that we forget about his vulnerability to hurt and pain, including emotional pain. If Mark 3 makes one thing clear, it is that the work of God's kingdom supersedes everything else, and for Jesus, personally, that was a painful reality, maybe as painful to him as his physical suffering on the Cross.

In recent years we've heard a lot of talk about "family values." For the most part the church must support those values and promote strong families. Strong marriages make strong families; strong families make strong churches; and strong churches make strong communities. But Jesus knew that being the Son of God meant that he could not make an idol out of his own family. Few of us like to think about what we would do if we had to choose between our spiritual family and our biological family, between ministry in God's name or happy relations with our loved ones. Lent, however, is a time for such questions.

What was Jesus' answer when faced with this dilemma? What would ours be? "*Who are my mother and brothers (and sisters)?*" Jesus asked in verse 33. His family is worried because people are saying he's insane. That can't look good for the rest of the family. The gospel of John reports that even his brothers didn't believe in him. So here he is in the center of a circle of listeners, with his immediate family nearby, and he says, "*Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother*" (3:34-35).

The early church was always impressed that the living Lord would call us his nearest relatives. With Jesus there are never any less-than-special people. The epistle to the Hebrews rejoices that "*Jesus is not ashamed to call [us] brothers and sisters*" (2:11). If we do the will of God, Jesus proclaims that we are his family. Jesus picks us and calls us his own, asking only that we do God's will.

He'll confuse you, offend you, anger you, but doesn't that happen with anyone you genuinely love? If someone is merely an image to you—like a movie star or a professional athlete—you can write them off. You can't say you love them. You're just fascinated by them.

Anyone you genuinely know and love will give you fits in your relationship with them from time to time. So will Jesus. Just remember that you give him fits too. We know a little about Jesus that bothers us, yet Jesus knows a lot more about us that bothers him and the Father.

But Jesus loves us anyway, making us a part of his very family, and forgiving us by dying on the cross. Jesus is God's Son and Jesus is our Brother.

He's a person we really need to learn much more about. Amen.