

**God of the ages, God near at hand,
God of the loving heart,
How do your children say Joy,
How do Your children say Home?**
(God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale, vs.1)



Mark 3:20-35

And the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered. "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" ---for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit." Then his mother and his brother came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

"Our Evolving Self"

What a miracle, the gift of life. How breath-taking to hold a newborn in the palm of our hand and sense the preciousness of a human soul. How heart-warming to see the soul's passion for becoming head, shoulders, knees and toes. How beautiful to touch baby soft skin, delighting in its nakedness. How peaceful to sense our Maker's unconditional love for us, just as we are. Birth is pure miracle. It is also a Hallmark moment for taking videos in the delivery room, for streaming naked photos through the "I Cloud," and for customizing birth announcement baby pictures. The parents, of course, delight in showing off their beautiful naked baby to the whole wide world. The little one loves it too . . . until, that is, love gives second birth to the ego. . . and the self is mortified when Mom and Dad pull out the naked baby in the bathtub pictures to show to their friends. Then we hear: "My feet are ugly," "my nose is hooked," "my thighs are fat," "Oh, no! I'm touching myself!" "You have to tell me I'm beautiful . . . you're my mother." "I know you wanted a boy." "Oh, no! A zit!" We shake our heads in bewilderment and wonder: "What ever happened to that original delight over one's adorable body and joyful self?"

When Elizabeth Caldwell, author of the book, 'Leaving Home with Faith' took a stab at coming up with an answer to that question for herself, she chose developmental psychology as her starting place. Here, theory suggests that growth in identity and sense of self is shaped within the context of relationships of intimacy, trust, and love; that change is a consistent variable; and that the self is embedded in an environment that has the three functions of holding on, letting go, and resting in place. Family is our first holding environment that "fosters developmental transformation or the process by which the whole ("how I am") gradually becomes a part ("how I was") of a new whole ("how I am now"). In adolescence, the holding environment of friends bridge individuation. As we grow into adulthood, college, workplace, significant others, and shared interest groups help color our character, enliven our

personality, strengthen our values, shape our moral conscience, enlighten meaning and purpose, and fuel our behavior.

For religious folk, one's community of faith is an important holding environment for fostering the development of self. For Jews and Christians the starting place for us is the belief that we are beloved children of God. Our identity as beloved children of God is our resting place of identity, the self's true home for becoming fully human. Our identity as beloved children of God is our ground of being for holding onto God's claim on us and for letting go of unhealthy cultural and familial expectations. Our identity as beloved children of God is the heavenly call to bless, not curse creation.

As I see it, the Bible, the written Word of God is all about the joys and sorrows, successes and failures, of ordinary people claiming their primary identity as beloved children of God amidst every inevitable change in life. The lectionary readings for today provide us with much food for thought.

Genesis 3:8-15 takes us for a walk with our the Lord God in the garden at the time of the evening breeze seeking the company of Adam and Eve . . . only to find them hiding from their Maker because of their nakedness . . . and only to discover that they thought that they knew more about their created goodness than God.

1 Samuel 8:4-20, wrote Jason Byassee, 'shows God's pain when God grants the people's wish for a king because "they have rejected me from being king over them" from "the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day (8:7-8)...God's people are suppose to be distinct, set apart, so as to be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1-3; Ex. 19:5-6). Israel is supposed to be different from the nations around them. But they insist they'd rather be identical to them: "We are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations" (1 Samuel 8:19-20). God wants a people set apart to be a light to

the nations. And, like insecure middle schoolers, we cram that light under a bushel in a pathetic effort to fit in.'" (from 'Out of the Depths', Sojourners, June 2015)

Mark 3:20-35 has Jesus back 'home again after having gone from his hometown to the wilderness to Galilee to the sea to Capernaum to a house to a deserted place and back out to the towns of Galilee and then back to Capernaum and home, and then to the sea and to Levi's house, through the grain fields and to the synagogue, and then back to the sea, into a boat, finally up to the mountain where he gathered his twelve disciples around him . . . all along his travels desperate crowds cling to him, begged for healing, and begged to be released from the demons that had hold of them. Back at home a group of religious critics picked at everything he did---breaking the rules about healing on the Sabbath, eating with tax collectors and sinners, and not fasting as he should. In other words, finding it more lawful to meet human need than to let human suffering go on unnecessarily. Back at home Jesus' family decided to do an intervention to stop his 'crazy' (risky and conflictual) behavior. But when they did, Jesus who understood the heart of God's law simply redefined his family as anyone who does the will of God' (from UCC Sermon Seeds).

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1 speaks of home-coming. 'So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Psalm 130 finds people of faith turning toward instead of hiding from God in hopes of being made whole with the Healing Presence of forgiving Love.