

Chris Currie
Sermon: Undone and Put Back Together
June 9, 2024
Mark 3:20-35

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” ²³ And he called them to him and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷ 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.

²⁸ “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin”— ³⁰ for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers^[a] are outside asking for you.” ³³ And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

This past Thursday, June 6, 2024, was the 80th anniversary of D-Day, the beginning of the end of the Third Reich’s stranglehold of Europe and the birth pangs of what would become Europe’s liberation from Hitler’s totalitarian occupation and reign of terror. Sadly concentration camps would not be liberated before six million of Europe’s Jews were exterminated. Over 16.4 million people served in World War II from every nation and part of the world, and today there are less than 119,550 who are still alive, according to the World War II Museum of New Orleans. In fact, one of those veterans, Robert Persichitti, 102 years old, fell ill last week in Germany on his way to Normandy for the D-Day ceremonies and later died. It is a special honor to continue to see and remember those who served in World War II who are still living. In a report on the ceremonies and events at Omaha, Utah,

and Juno beaches that took place Thursday in Normandy, a news commentator mentioned that the next big anniversary, the 90th anniversary of D-Day may not include any of those who served. It is a grace to live in a time when we can still learn from, remember, and thank those, many of whom were in their late teens and early twenties, for defending freedom in the face of something tyrannical, evil, and inhumane.

This week, on Tuesday, a giant of a theologian died as well. Like many of those World War II veterans we celebrated this week, Jurgen Moltmann lived to the ripe old age of 96. In fact, he was also a veteran of World War II and at the age of 16 ‘was drafted into the German air force and assigned to defend Hamburg with an 88 mm anti-aircraft flak gun.’ Even though Moltmann grew up in a nonreligious family in Germany, his parents sent him to confirmation class at the local state church where Moltmann learned little about ‘Jesus, the Bible, or the Christian life,’ but instead the pastor focused all the lessons ‘on trying to prove that Jesus wasn’t Jewish but Aryan,’ promoting Nazi ideology. In addition about the same time, Moltmann was sent to the Hitler Youth and not too much later drafted with schoolmate Gerhard Schopper to man a platform on a lake near Hamburg with an anti-aircraft gun. In July of 1943, one year before D-Day, the British engaged in a bombing campaign that ‘sent 1000 planes to drop explosives and incendiaries on Hamburg, starting a firestorm that melted metal, asphalt, and glass. Anything organic—wood, fabric, flesh—was consumed by a sea of fire. Temperatures rose above 1400 degrees Fahrenheit.’ Nearly 40,000 people were killed and after the attack was over, the 16 year old Moltmann found himself ‘floating in the lake, clinging to a shattered piece of wood’ from what was left of his gun platform. His friend and schoolmate was dead. Towards the end of the war, the young German was sent to the frontlines and in 1945 was captured and sent to a prisoner of war camp in Scotland. In the camp, a Church of Scotland/Presbyterian chaplain gave him a New Testament with the psalms and he would read from psalm 39 each night: ‘Hear my prayer, Lord, listen to my cry for help; do not be deaf to my weeping.’ In Moltmann’s words: ‘I didn’t find Christ. He found me...there, in the Scottish prisoner of war camp, in the dark pit of my soul, Jesus sought me and found me. ‘He came to seek that which was lost (Luke 19:10), and so he came to me.’¹

That is the problem with Jesus. He never just loves the people we think he should. Or to borrow from Anne Lamott’s turn of phrase, ‘you can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.’ In our passage from Mark, Jesus himself is called into question. In his

¹ Daniel Silliman, ‘Died: Jurgen Moltmann, Theologian of Hope,’ *Christianity Today*, June 4, 2024.

own hometown, not only is Jesus not considered a prophet, but here in our passage people are saying he has lost his mind, preaching in parables, healing diseases, calling disciples, extended forgiveness and community far beyond the bounds of what constituted purity or social norm or religious custom. And at the beginning of our passage, Jesus' own family are trying to restrain him and calm him down.

When I was in seminary, I remember hearing from other peers and colleagues about their decision to enter ministry. In some cases, they came from very conservative or evangelical backgrounds and as result their home churches or families no longer considered them Christian or denounced them/cancelled them for leaving the fold. There were others who came from no religious background and whose families assumed they were crazy for discerning a call and pursuing a seminary degree. I took it for granted that family members and churches would support me and I am not sure how it would affected me if the decision had more resistance or rejection. Suffice to say, I am not sure if Jesus' family is fully on board with his call to be God's Messiah. They themselves seem resistant to this possibility, not just the scribes who come down from Jerusalem. Everyone. His home town people and countrymen think he's gone crazy, the religious leaders accuse him have being satanic, and his soft landing spot, his own family, are saying, 'can you please just keep your head down and be quiet.' All the bonds, all the connections, all things we think are important, are undone. According to the religious leaders, Jesus is not just wrong, but demonic and satanic. According to his own countrymen, just is not only acting with patriotism, but his acting mentally unstable. According to Jesus family, he needs to be restrained and silenced before he drags them all through the mud and ruins his family name. All the bonds and all the connections and all the ties that bind are undone and unraveled and broken. But Jesus keeps talking.

In verse 28 after these confrontations, he says 'Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness...' In other words, don't believe I am who I say I am, fine, but don't dispute the work of the Holy Spirit. In the words of biblical commentator Richard Horsley, 'from the Markan viewpoint, attacks on Jesus during his mission can be forgiven, but not attacks against the Holy Spirit acting in his movement.'² And then at the end of our passage Jesus' mother and brothers and family come to hear him. They have returned and now Jesus can be reunited with his estranged family and we can script a hallmark moment before our passage ends with hugs and mea culpas and

² Richard Horsley in the *Oxford Annotated Bible*, 4.28-30.

everyone singing kum ba yah. In fact, the crowd gathered around notices that Jesus' family are way in the back and outside trying to see in. Maybe they figured that they should have VIP seats up close or be brought in as part of Jesus' entourage. 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you,' they rely to Jesus. And instead of reuniting with family exactly as things were before or elevating his family to the front row seats, Jesus does not dismiss family, he redefines it. He undoes it and then puts it back together in a very different way. 'Who are my mother and brothers,' he asks. 'Whoever does the will of God is my brothers and sister and mother.' Family is redefined not by DNA, not by blood, not by where you come from, not by who your people are, not by class or caste, but by those who do the will of God, those who are trying to live their lives to reflect the grace and justice and love of Jesus Christ. This is why it is sometimes said when we baptized a child that what we are saying in that act is that water is thicker than blood and that entry into Christian community relativizes and re-prioritizes all other bonds, whether it be family, nation, ideology, or all our other allegiances.

Which brings me back to Jurgen Moltmann. Our sworn enemy on D-Day 1944, God would accompany a frightened 16 year-old clinging for dear life after an all night bombing, and accompany him into a prisoner of war camp where he called out first 'my God where are you?' and in the midst of loss, shattered illusions, and through the ministry and kindness of the church's representative to a defeated, disillusioned, undone human being, God would put him back together and use him mightily to pastor, teach, and write for the worldwide church and reminding in his theology that the presence of God is often most acute and transformative in suffering. In Moltmann's own words: 'God weeps with us so that we may someday laugh with him.'³

Undone and put back together again. A God who wills more for us than just what our DNA or our familial origins or our national allegiances might infer. 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.' And sometimes in a very real sense, the enemies of today are the brothers and sisters of tomorrow, and water is thicker than blood. Amen.

³ Daniel Sillman, 'Died: Jurgen Moltmann, Theologian of Hope,' June 4, 2024.