

**Sunday 04th May 2025**

Practicing the Way - Life Together in Community (Part 2)

**Andrew Kitcatt on Mark 3:31-35 (Jesus' Mother and Brothers)**

So, I've got the joy of speaking about community. This is something that hits very personal to me as I speak, because as many of you know Heather and I have not been in Bath very long. For my part, I had lived in the same village for 30 years and gone to the same church since I was a boy. The church community we had there was stellar, second to none. When we got married, the amount of support we got to make it happen was amazing. We received so much love. And so leaving that behind was really quite a hard thing to do. We didn't really know anybody, as far as we knew, you guys could have all been really *really* strange (even stranger than me). But the amount of love we received upon our arrival was more than we could ever have hoped for. From being given places to stay, to being gifted things that helped us make our first home, to being invited to meals. Just mesmerising, and on behalf of Heather and I wanted to thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

So, when it comes to community, I think I've had some excellent experience. And I have had a glimpse of what Jesus is talking about in our reading. You may have noticed that our reading was very very short, and that really sums up Mark quite well, I think. His gospel is the shortest by far – if you were to read it aloud it would probably take you an hour and a half. When I was a first-year student, a bunch of my friends and I took part in a production of *The Mark Drama*. Over the course of a weekend, we performed a very minimalist, dramatised rendition of Mark's gospel. very minimalist performance of the gospel of Mark. I played the part of Peter, which meant that whilst I was one of Jesus' best friends, I also denied him 6 times over the course of the weekend. (And that *doesn't* include rehearsals).

And the performances themselves lasted only a couple of hours. Mark's gospel is short, punchy and to the point. And our reading here is only in the third chapter. If we're doing maths with Bible verses, we're 15.19% through the Gospel. And given how brief it is, everything in Mark's gospel is incredibly important to him. Ink for writing was precious, and so are the words that we read in Mark. So this story isn't just thrown in for no reason - if we track Mark, it should make perfect sense. And where we're going to go this evening is:

- 1) What is a member of the Kingdom Community like?
- 2) What isn't a member of the Kingdom Community like?
- 3) And finally, what can we do for one another, as members of Christ's kingdom community?

So lets make a start in Mark.

### **Context**

The first words in Mark's gospel are "The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1), and essentially everything we read from here, up until and beyond our reading in chapter 3, is the result of Mark trying to prove this. In other words: "this is who Jesus is, and this is why what you're about to read happens at all." If we don't understand that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, none of what we read about, like all the miracles Jesus performs, the wise sayings he gives, makes any sense at all.

He is the Messiah, THEREFORE John baptises him.

He is the Messiah, THEREFORE Satan tempts him in the desert.

He is the Messiah, THEREFORE, Jesus preaches the Kingdom.

He is the Messiah, THEREFORE, he performs healing upon healing upon healing.

He is the Messiah, THEREFORE, his disciples do not fast, and he is Lord of the Sabbath

He is the Messiah, THEREFORE he casts out demons

He is the Messiah, THEREFORE crowds are constantly pressing in on him

And finally, He is the Messiah, THEREFORE those who do the will of his Father, are his mother and brothers.

## What is a 'Messiah'?

And this word Messiah that I'm using is for our day and age, one of the most exciting words in the whole world. It's a word that means 'anointed one'. Another word for it is Christ. And it tells us something about who Jesus is, and what he's come to do. For Jesus to be the Messiah means that he is the King of his Father's kingdom. And the idea of this Kingdom, with Jesus as its King, is *the* heaviest idea in Mark's theological rucksack as we come to our reading. When you read Mark's gospel, he is preaching about a Kingdom. Jesus is king. But over who? Who are its citizens? If you're a Christian here this evening – good news! It's you. You are a de facto citizen – you've booked your seat for the kingdom.

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## The Parable of The Sower: How to do Community in the Kingdom

And this passage is answering the question what it means for someone to be a citizen of the kingdom, to have Jesus as our king? What ought Christians be striving to do *together*?

It's the will of God.

Now as I was studying this passage, I noticed something very peculiar. Just for context, when you're doing a Bible study, digging into God's word to learn about him, apply his will to your life, it's important that we never to look at stories or sayings in isolation. We should always read them in context. The stories aren't randomly placed.

And also, the same story can appear in multiple gospels. Our reading is also in Matthew and Luke. And I noticed something that I had never seen before. In Mark and Matthew, Jesus says "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." And then Jesus gives the Parable of the Sower. Whereas Luke puts the Parable of the Sower *before*.

Hmmm - So, who's right? Did Jesus give the Parable of the Sower before or after our reading? Did the gospel writers disagree on the order of what Jesus said?

Short answer is, we don't know what the actual order is. And we don't really need to worry about it, because the gospels didn't worry about it. It's important to remember that writings back then were not anywhere near as bothered about whether things were in chronological order, unlike how we might be today. They were more prone to organising things thematically. So, if you're reading your gospels in the Bible, and you see stories written in different places in the gospels, don't panic.

So, how does the Parable of the Sower end. And just to catch up, the Parable of the Sower is the story of a man sowing seeds. God is the man; people are the seeds. The seeds fall on different types of ground, and the good seed falls on good soil. And listen to Jesus' description of that person.

**“But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, (and get this...) who hear the word of the *kingdom*, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. Some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”**  
**(Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15).**

So, did we get that? “Who hear the word of the *kingdom*.” What a shocker! It's all about the Kingdom. Who could have guessed. We should not be at all surprised that our reading appears near the Parable of the Sower.

Jesus: “Who are my mother and my brothers? Those who do the will of my father in heaven.”

Reader: “Well then Jesus, what does that person look like?”

Jesus: “Someone who hears the word of the Kingdom and keep it”.

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*That* is what it means to be a part of a Kingdom community. Everyone looking for, yearning for, God's word. Listening in, pressing into his voice, as revealed in the Bible. And thereby growing together.

Now let's notice that the Sower didn't plant just one seed into each bit of soil. Every bit of ground, no matter if rocky or thorny or good soil, is littered with seeds. And I think what we can take from this is two things. One follows the other. It means that we are never meant to be alone. You're never going to be the only seed in the good soil. Why is that? It's because (and this is the second point), God is the Sower, it means that there will *a/ways* be seed in the good soil. There will always be a church. Remember what Jesus said to Peter?...

**“On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”**

**Matthew 16:18**

The Church of Christ will *never* be overcome. You will never be on your own because God said so. And I don't think it is a coincidence that Jesus said this to Peter after Peter had just declared...what?

**“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”**

**Matthew 16:16**

Our community comes with a royal seal, from the Kingdom and its king - Jesus.

### **How not to do community in the Kingdom**

So, we've seen on a broad level what it means to be a member of the Kingdom community. Remember, it's doing God's will. And the reason the Parable of the Sower is so close to this story is so that we, the reader, understands what that person is like.

And it also shows how *not* to do Kingdom community. Let's just take a quick look at the other seeds. Some land on the path – where the birds, the church's adversaries, take the word away. Taking away access to hearing God through his word. For some Christians today that might mean having limited or no access to Bibles. And another way is isolating ourselves, so we don't hear people preaching the word to us. With the rise of online church, it can be all too tempting to stay at home, stick on your favourite Christian preacher, listen to your favourite Christian worship artist. We can curate our own ideal church service from the comfort of our own homes. That's a sure-fire way to make it impossible to actively love one another. We are to meet together regularly. Some seed lands on rocky ground – they first receive the word with joy, but they buckle under pressure and persecution. And then there are those who land on thorns, who hear the word, but find it no substitute for wealth or satisfying their own desires instead of looking to serve the Lord.

And notice again, how as the seed on good soil is never alone, the seeds on the not-so-good soil are also not alone. And as Christians we do need to be on guard concerning the company that we keep. And I will say *straightaway* that I am absolutely *not* saying don't hang out with people who aren't Christians or whatever. That should go without saying, that should be obvious. It's just to ask ourselves if someone we are hanging out with is influencing us in such a way that means that we find it increasingly difficult or unpleasant to do God's word. I found this particularly true when I began dating as a student. If you're dating someone and they're constantly leading you away from Jesus, then you need to ask the question "is that person really who God wants for me?" Again, it's not completely cutting people off, we just need to give ourselves the freedom to check ourselves.

The first Psalm puts it like this...

**Psalm 1**

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the one  
who does not walk in step with the wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
or sit in the company of mockers,  
<sup>2</sup> but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and who meditates on his law day and night.  
<sup>3</sup> That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither—  
whatever they do prospers.

Notice how the person in the Psalm starts by walking, then they stand, and then they sit. They compromise. We must not be like that.

## **It's All About Love**

And why must we not be like that? What can a Kingdom community expect to see when we start to compromise? Remember Jesus' words - "those who do the will of my Father...". Here are just a couple of things that the Bible says that we can be doing to honour Jesus' words. I regularly reflect on the passage that I'm about to read. This is from John's gospel, and it's Jesus talking to his disciples.

**"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."  
John 13:34-35**

Did we get that? "Love one another as I have loved you?" - that's beautiful. That's a love that only we as Christians can do. Because we have Jesus. If we want to "love proper", "love real", then we need King Jesus as our example. And I find it absolutely amazing going through the New Testament and seeing examples of this in action.

Here are just a few examples:

Jesus' brother, James, wrote passionately against favouritism and privilege.

**<sup>3</sup> If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," <sup>4</sup> have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?  
James 2:3-4**

He also wrote

**<sup>27</sup> Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.  
James 1:27**

## Prayer

And finally, in your own time I would look through the New Testament and just notice how many times Paul writes that he is *praying* to the recipients of his letters. It cannot be stated enough how vital prayer is. We don't have time, but I would love it if at some time during the week we could read John 17, when Jesus prays for his disciples.

THIS is what we miss out on if we compromise on our love by isolating ourselves. Not seeking to be seed on the good soil, isolating ourselves. So, my encouragement to us this evening is "let's be ruthless in our love for one another". Let's be severely keen to serve one another. Always looking ahead to the day when the kingdom will come, and Jesus will come to reign in everlasting peace and joy.

We can't bring the Kingdom (that's Jesus' job).  
But we can show it. So, let's do that together.