

*The Lessons Appointed for Use on the*

**Sunday closest to June 8**

**Proper 5**

**Year B**

**RCL**



1 Samuel 8:4-11, 16-20

Psalms 138

Mark 3:20-35

The Collect

O God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**1 Samuel 8:4-11, 16-20**

All the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, “You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.” But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to govern us.” Samuel prayed to the LORD, and the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. Now then, listen to their voice; only – you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”

So Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of

your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! But we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

**Psalm 138 Page 793, BCP**

*Confitebor tibi*

- <sup>1</sup> I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I will sing your praise.
- <sup>2</sup> I will bow down toward your holy temple and praise your Name, because of your love and faithfulness;
- <sup>3</sup> For you have glorified your Name and your word above all things.
- <sup>4</sup> When I called, you answered me; you increased my strength within me.
- <sup>5</sup> All the kings of the earth will praise you, O LORD, when they have heard the words of your mouth.
- <sup>6</sup> They will sing of the ways of the LORD, that great is the glory of the LORD.
- <sup>7</sup> Though the LORD be high, he cares for the lowly; he perceives the haughty from afar.
- <sup>8</sup> Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies; your right hand shall save me.
- <sup>9</sup> The LORD will make good his purpose for me; O LORD, your love endures for ever; do not abandon the works of your hands.

## **2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1**

Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture – “I believed, and so I spoke” – we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

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.

**Mark 3:20-35**

The crowd came together again, so that Jesus and his disciples 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 Beelzebul, 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 brothers 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.”





## SERMON

I won't pull any punches. Today's Gospel text is one of the most heart-breaking in the entire Gospel of Mark for in this passage Jesus rejects His own mother! Worse yet, Mark tells us nothing that would lead us to believe that she saw this coming. We look to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke for angelic assurances to Mary. In those Gospels, Mary ponders her supernatural encounters with God in her heart. In Matthew and Luke, the family of Jesus is in on the mystery. They are complicit in Jesus' ministry. Not so, Mark. Mark has no stories of Mary being assured by angels or comforted by her cousin. Mark tells us nothing about Mary's knowledge of Jesus' identity. In Mark, Jesus is Mary's first-born, her own little boy. It is from Mark's telling that we get the heart-rending carol, "Mary, Did You Know?"

Mary, did you know  
that your Baby Boy would one day walk on wa-  
ter?

Mary, did you know  
that your Baby Boy would save our sons and  
daughters?

Did you know  
that your Baby Boy has come to make you  
new?

This Child that you delivered will soon deliver  
you.

Mary, did you know?

All of us who have raised children, our own or oth-  
ers', know how much we wish for them a rewarding,  
happy and secure life. When our children suffer, we suf-  
fer. Mary's first-born, Yehoshuah, seems to be having  
trouble establishing himself. He's thirty years old, and  
hasn't married! Mary is a widow. Her husband, Joseph,  
is long dead, and she is dependent upon her children for  
her support, but her first-born can't seem to find his

place. He doesn't work, and now he's become fascinated with religion.

Kat's brother John had those difficulties. Those of us who have had children who can't seem to find their place in life know the pain Mary must have felt as her son, Joshua, pursued an increasingly unsettled and dangerous life. You can imagine the pitying looks of the other women of the town whose sons were doing what they should do and providing for their support, and the looks of condemnation from the men who saw Jesus as radical, a lazy boy who wouldn't work to support his mother and who spends all his time idling with other radicals.

“Tell him to get a job and do what's right”, the glares of the men said to her. “Is it up to us to provide for you when your own son refuses?”

“I'm so sorry”, whispered the women to her.

And then, a day came, a terrible day. One of the townsfolk ran to her door and delivered awful news. “Your son has lost his mind! Come, help us restrain him!”

Her eyes brimming with tears for the thing she had feared had apparently come to pass, Mary gathered her family and ran for the place where Jesus was. Perhaps she could yet save her boy from the crowd, for First Century Palestine was not a safe place to say dangerous things.

Mark’s Gospel begins with the simple words, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” If it did not begin with these words of assurance, I don’t know how we could bear to read this account of Mary running to her son’s aid without collapsing into tears. In Mark, we know. Mary does not. Like mothers always have, she ran to her child in his time of danger.

If we didn't know that Jesus is the Son of God, how could we bear, as Mary must do, his words when she arrives?

Then his mother and his brothers 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."

When we think of heart-breaking stories in the Gospels, we think of Jesus laying down His life for us. We don't often think of the agony of Mary who watched His death after suffering this cut from her first-born. The suffering of Jesus and His mother was real. To Mary, it was inexplicable. It was soul-searing agony to hear words like that from her son!

I cannot imagine words which would cut a mother's heart more deeply than these. Why is our Lord apparently being deliberately cruel to His mother? What does it tell us about our relationship with God, Himself? We are so accustomed to address God as "Our Father". I wonder if we ever think about God as a parent? Certainly, the punishing account from Mark today awakens feelings of sympathy from everyone, but how often do we think sympathetically about the anguish of God, our Father, as His children go off the rails right and left?

To offer us insight into God's relationship to us as a parent, we have our First Testament passage, a thousand years earlier. The Israelites had lived for years without a king in a covenant community, in partnership with God, and unlike their neighbors who had human kings to govern them. In place of a king, God Himself raised up Judges to protect his chosen ones from current danger.

Samuel was the last of the Judges. In a real way, the Israelites were in God's hands alone and dependent on His protection.

Recognition of God's sovereignty meant they had no need for a hierarchical government of king and retainers and court. Indeed, what better way to live than in the hands of God, who would protect His people by raising up a judge when they were threatened? It is like living in a cohesive family with a strong parent to protect you.

But then, the people said to Samuel, "Give us a king to govern us."

But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us."

Well, of course it did. If you live in the protection of God, why would you want to divide your loyalties between God and a king? If your Father in Heaven has borne you upon the wings of eagles, fed you His own manna, stood ready to protect you and nourish you as a

parent does their child, what better arrangement is there? Gideon was offered the throne and replied, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you.<sup>1</sup>” The Israelites were the people with a divine king, yet they wanted to reject their divine King just so that they could be like their neighbors!

How did their Heavenly Father receive this affront?

Samuel prayed to the LORD, and the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you.

“Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day ... ” Are we doing any better? The people of Samuel’s time turned from their covenant relationship with a sovereign God

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<sup>1</sup> Judges 8:23



to be governed by a king, to be like other people. Jesus came to restore a new covenant community, a community founded once again on the care and protection of a sovereign God, but that means submitting to God's Will and rejecting the comfort of being like other people. The church teaches that the Gift of God's Grace is freely given, and so it is, but the receipt of God's Grace carries a great responsibility – one that insists that God's Will for you as a servant to His children takes precedence over everything else in your life.

The word I am drawn to, and the contrast that catches my heart, is the word “governed”.

But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! But we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

Contrast this to what Jesus told his Disciples in his

## Farewell Discourse:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.<sup>2</sup>

Individually, we can choose to be governed by a king, who will fight our battles for us. We can go through life carefully obeying the dictates of that king. We will never incur serious criticism. We will be seen as good citizens. We will be inoffensive, but we will not heal the world of its hurts. We will not be arrested if we turn out backs on hunger, but those who suffer hunger will not be fed. We will not be arrested if we do not oppose injustice in our country, but those who suffer from injustice will not be comforted.

Mary's cry of torment is echoed through the next three hundred years by the cry of mothers and daugh-

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<sup>2</sup> John 16:4b-15

ters, sons and fathers as those called to the name Christian faced down the lions and the flames of Rome. It echoes still today from the families of those killed in various parts of the world for their stubborn insistence on their call to the name Christian.

I want to leave you with this thought as you think about Jesus' words to His mother. I'm hesitant to do so, since my teachers all advise against being autobiographical, but if I really believe as I am urging you to do, I need to share this. It's from the book I gave you:

What we DO, the positions we take and the things we act on define what Christianity IS for the time in which we live. If we are seen to take positions of hate and intolerance, then Christianity is perceived as the religion of hate and intolerance ...

If we clothe ourselves, so that all can see, with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, if we bear with each other and forgive

whatever grievances we may have against one another ... we will be perceived as the faith of compassion, the faith of kindness, humility, gentleness and forgiveness.

I could not tell those twelve jurors I hadn't even met yet that they had the power reserved to God alone to decide life or death, however carefully it was done. To do so might cause them to fall into the sin of believing they are wiser than God. I told the courts that I could not, and at the next election, I lost my job, my life's work; my twenty-four-year career. And the jobs of five other families who worked for me. I must now live with that decision.

Those five families who lost their jobs did nothing wrong. They were exemplary people, committed to doing a good job, and they did a good job. Just like Mary, they were crushed by what I did, and I must live with the certainty that I was responsible for what happened to them.

I could easily have kept the case, kept my mouth shut, plead it out for a life sentence, and maybe all those people would still have their jobs. All I had to do was to hide my faith under a basket. For better or worse, I chose not to do so. If we, as Christians, cannot stand up and give our Christianity as the very reason that we do the things we do, then there is no point in being a Christian. I did what I did, and I said why I did it as clearly as I could manage so that as many people as possible could know that Christianity is the religion of love.

It is the impact upon those five families that I want you to think about as you think about the impact upon Mary of her son's faithful following of His Father's word. To be a Christian is not to be like other people. It is a burden and a heart-break. It has historically been stalked by tears and death. Never allow your comfort to so muffle your attention to the direction of the Holy Spirit that you fail to follow His direction. For this you

were chosen from before all time.

AMEN

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*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

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