

Where You're Safe

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[0 : 00] Our scripture today is from the book of Mark, chapter 3, verses 20 through 35. Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.

When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, he is out of his mind. And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, he is possessed by Beelzebub.

By the prince of demons, he is driving out demons. So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables.

How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand. His end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up.

[1 : 20] Then he can plunder the strong man's house. Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter.

But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. And they are guilty of an eternal sin. He said this because they were saying, he has an impure spirit.

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.

Who are my mother and my brothers, he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, here are my mother and my brothers.

Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So friends, let's pray together.

[2 : 31] Almighty and gracious God, thank you for the gift it is to have this moment and this time. Thank you for the ways in which you have moved among us already today in song, in word, and in prayer. And Lord, as we come now, plant that seed in us that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and glory of your name.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. So you see on your bulletin today that we're talking about where you are safe. Where you're safe.

Where are you safe? It's not a rhetorical question. Where are you safe? Hopefully everybody's got at least a list, right?

There should be at least one or two places where you feel safe. You know, this thing about feeling safe is a little strange because safe can mean different things to people.

And safe is one of those words that everybody knows what it means until you ask them to define it. And so let's talk about what we mean by safe, right?

[3 : 33] So safe for a lot of folks is this place where things that I'm afraid of, I'm not worried about. These things that concern me, these worries of the world, I can go to this place and they're not as present for me.

And that's what makes people feel safe. It's not a bad definition. It's probably the best one we're going to get. Now we know that in the world there's no guarantees of safety.

Which is odd for us because so many of us spend so much time and energy chasing that feeling. Wanting to be free of that sense of fear and risk.

You know, there's a lot of people who are very worried about safety in the world right now. You know, I did a little homework, as you all know I want to do, about this feeling of safety.

What was fascinating about it is it said that 80% of people, 4 out of 5, are worried about their risk of crime. They have some fear of it.

[4 : 44] 4 out of 5. Now psychiatry, magazine for psychiatrists, journal for them, this is what they said people are worried about. So first, they said 70% of people were anxious about keeping themselves or their families safe.

That's that crime thing. 68% were worried about keeping their identity safe. Meaning having your social security, etc. stolen, right? 66%, 2 out of 3, were worried about health concerns.

That they didn't want to get some disease or something that would incapacitate them. 65%, more or less, 2 out of 3, are anxious about financial safety. Making sure they can meet their bills, pay their expenses.

And 59% worried about the impact of climate on the planet. That what we are doing, the choices we are making, and what we seem to be, how that's putting us in a different set of risk.

So, again, I want you to put those things down next to you. What are the things that get to you? What are the things that make you feel unsafe?

[5 : 53] And where are the places that you feel you're safest? It may not even be a place. Maybe it's just when you're in the company of certain people, you feel safe. That that's where you kind of let it go.

You kind of lay that stuff down. But everybody chases this to some degree. Everybody needs it. There are those who believe that it's just a fundamental human trait.

That we look for some sense of security. Now, here's our thing. So, what gives you that?

I mean, is it really just being in a particular location? Is it being in certain company? Because what's challenging about that is we know that that's fleeting.

There's no way you can always be with the people who make you feel that way. There's no way you can always be in the place that makes you feel that way. And when we've got a world out here that's bombarding us with different stories, different information, different messages, it's weird to try and land in this safe place and stay there.

[7 : 05] Now, I want us to think about that because today's Bible lesson takes us to an interesting place about how we understand what it means to be safe.

And there's different kinds of threats, different kinds of threats that we see all throughout the story. And so, we need to unpack that because we get to the answer at the end.

So, if you want to follow along, it's Mark chapter 3. Go ahead and grab your Bibles. Mark chapter 3. And we're going to start at verse 20. Mark chapter 3. We're starting at verse 20.

Now, you heard Sandy read this for us. And while you're getting to the page, there's a little background I want you to get. Now, the way Mark tells a lot of Jesus' life, what happens is he starts a story, he plants a story in the middle, then he finishes the first story.

And that's kind of what we're dealing with today. So, he starts one story, puts something else in the middle, and then finishes the story at the end. And that's how this particular reading is set up. Okay?

[8 : 06] So, Mark chapter 20. We start at the first piece. Then Jesus entered a house. And again, a crowd gathered, so he and his disciples were not even able to eat.

So, let's set the scene. Jesus is starting his ministry. He's pretty early in his public ministry. He's moving through the region of Capernaum, going from place to place, house to house. And he's been preaching.

He's got these messages that are drawing people to him. But more than that, he's healing people. He's casting out demons. People see legitimate fruit from Jesus' ministry.

And so, he's drawing these crowds. People are seeking him out because he's doing things that nobody else can do. And so, he gets to this house. Depending on what translation you're reading, that might say home.

Like it says Jesus went home in some translations. Okay? But, picture the scene. So, Jesus has got the disciples with him. They go into this house.

[9 : 09] And this crowd of people that wants Jesus to do things for them has mobbed the house. Okay? It's to the point, as it says, that they can't even eat. Right?

So, that's where we are. Now, that sets up the next part. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him.

For they said, he's out of his mind. Now, this is the fun thing about families, as we all know. Right? Because it usually doesn't take much for people in a family to think somebody else in the family has lost their mind.

But, I want you to put this into context. Jesus is Jesus. Think about what we just said. He's been moving through this region.

Preaching. Teaching. He's starting to get a reputation. He's starting to get famous. Okay? And he's been preaching these things about the kingdom of God. He's been doing these things that people can't really run from.

[10 : 14] That are transformational. And so, Mary and his family are sitting over in Nazareth. And word is reaching them about what Jesus is doing. And some of what he's saying. So, they're starting to get worried.

Legitimately worried. And if you really want to understand why they're worried, I want you to look a little further up at the beginning of chapter 3. Remember what we read last week. That Jesus was going through two particular stories.

That's what we talked about last week. One at the end of Mark chapter 2. Where the disciples were plucking heads off the grain as they were walking through a field. And the Pharisees challenged them on it.

And Jesus taught them a lesson. Then, we get to the beginning of chapter 3. And they're in a synagogue. They're having church, basically. And there's a man there with a deformed hand.

And Jesus heals the hand. But, he also kind of puts the Pharisees in their place when he does it. Okay? So, here's the reason that this fear starts to perk up in the family.

[11 : 20] Because not only is he saying these pretty wild things. But, he's challenging and embarrassing the authorities. He's going after people with power.

And people with power don't like that. And when you do that, sometimes people with power do things that are, quite frankly, dangerous. So, Mary's legitimately worried.

Now, here's the thing. This is a bit odd, right? Because Mary knows who Jesus is. She's the first one to know who Jesus is. But, Mary is coming from her place of love, like most moms would, right?

That her son is putting himself in danger. That's what she sees. So, even though he's the son of God. And remember, Mary was the one who sort of called him out.

It's time for you to help people. She's the one who made him do his first miracle. Remember that? But, that's different than when you start challenging the temple. And that's what Mary sees now.

[12 : 30] And another twist on this story is that Mark is very deliberate about saying it's Mary and his brothers. You'll notice who's missing from the story. That's Joseph.

Joseph, as head of the household, if he was worried about his eldest son, Joseph should have been in this conversation. Which is why most people believe that by the time Jesus entered his public ministry, Joseph had probably died.

Okay? Okay? Okay? So, the fact this is where we are. So, you got this family who's worried about their son, brother.

Because he's saying these wild things that could get him into trouble. He's not safe. There's also this pretense, there's this sense that what he's doing will spill back on them.

Because if he's over there being weird, then everybody's going to look at them, say, what's going on with him? And so, there's this desire to get to this safe place.

[13 : 38] Let's keep going. So, what happens in the story now is Mark shifts gears. Remember, starts a story, plants something in the middle. We're at the new thing. So, leaders from the temple in Jerusalem come to see what Jesus is doing.

And after they do that, they've seen Jesus do these extraordinary things. But here's the thing. They lob this at him and say, well, he must be an agent of the devil.

And because he can do tricks of the devil, he can make everybody think that we're actually casting out the devil. Huh. See, the thing about this is when God is at work in people's lives, and we see these new things, we see these things that challenge us, these things that are kind of undeniable, people want to try and explain it.

And when God doesn't fit into our nice preset set of expectations, when God does stuff that doesn't make sense to us, in other words, God shows up and didn't check with us first, we start saying, well, that really can't be God then.

Because it doesn't look like the way I thought God was going to look. He's not doing the things that I thought God was going to do. He's talking to these people who we don't like, and we say are sinners, and because he's doing all that stuff, well, he really can't be God then.

[15 : 09] He can't really be representing God then. That's not what God's supposed to look like, according to the way we understand it. Some of y'all, in your own journey with faith, may have had people say that about you.

Because you were out here doing different things. You were looking at the world with a much wider lens and a much bigger heart than people were used to seeing on you. There were some things you left behind, there were some behaviors that you decided to change because God was at work in you.

And people are like, we don't recognize that. We don't know what that is. And people start lobbing different kinds of insults at you. May sound familiar.

I think he's lost his mind. Okay? But that's what happens when God starts to change inside you.

And you start to change in front of people who knew you. So Jesus being Jesus, of course, has something to say about this. He says that your logic doesn't work.

[16 : 19] Because if this person is possessed by Satan, why would I, if I'm an agent of Satan, cast Satan out? It doesn't make any sense. Satan is winning if he's in this person.

So why, if I'm an agent of Satan, would I do that? It just doesn't make any sense. But here's the real problem. It's because people who are claiming to know God, people who are claiming faith, are saying, even though they're seeing the result, see, and that's key, they're seeing the result.

And they're looking at it and going, no, that really can't be God. Not only did they say that really can't be God, they actually said it was evil. And that's where Jesus comes back at them and says, you know, God will put up with a lot.

God's grace can do a whole lot of things and cover a multitude of sins. But one thing God will not tolerate is when you know God is at work.

You know it in your heart of hearts. You may not want to admit it, but you know there's that part of you that knows that God is doing something special. And what you choose to do is say, nope, that can't be God, that's evil.

[17 : 49] That's evil. It's like, you are looking at the work and presence of the Holy Spirit.

That you have seen this man who was possessed and you know he's no longer possessed. And that you can't cast the strong, you can't raid the strong man's health without being stronger than the strong man.

Right? In other words, if Satan has this dude, then I have to be stronger than Satan in order to beat Satan. Who do you think can do that? But because I'm not fitting into your box, you're going to throw that label on me.

And you say, God will put up with a lot, but God won't put up with that. And the thing is, if you're one of those folks, one of those Pharisees, it's an interesting time for a lot of folk, right?

Because what happens is that they see this sort of stuff happening in the world. And we lob stuff at it. We say things about it.

[18 : 57] We do these kinds of things that will say, nope, that doesn't fit into our box. But here's the thing that's underneath it. What's motivating the Pharisees here is something very simple.

Is that Jesus is a threat to them. Because they can't explain him away and they can't do what he can do. He's a threat to them.

Because remember, everybody flocked to this house. This crowd around them trying to eat is not the crowd you see at church on Sunday. And because of that, they're threatened.

Meaning, they're not feeling very safe. So we get to the end of the story. So let's read this part together.

Let's go to verse 31. Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in the column.

[20 : 01] Remember, crowded house. So big they can't eat. So they send somebody in to get Jesus. Okay? Crowd was sitting around him. And they told him, your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.

Who are my mother and my brothers? He asked. Then he looked at those seated in the circle around him and said, here are my mother and my brothers.

Before we read that last verse, I want us to focus in on this. Because this is one of those times when people read Jesus and they kind of go, I can't believe he would say that. Right?

You know, that people go, why would he treat his mom like that? And people have misunderstood what Jesus is doing. Okay?

That's really what's happening. It's people fundamentally misunderstood what Jesus is doing. Jesus is not disrespecting his family. I want you to hear that again. Jesus is not disrespecting his family. Because some folks read that and they think that's what's happening.

[21 : 05] But here's the difference. I want you to put yourself in that crowd of people. That you're one of these everyday, working, living people in this part of Israel.

That you're barely getting by. You may have enough food on the table, but you've got to work really hard. And you're trying to eke out a life. And you've done the things you think you're supposed to do.

You've been going to synagogue regularly. And you've said the prayers and you've heard the lessons and you go out and you get up every day and then maybe somebody close to you, mother, brother, mother, father, what have you, comes down with some serious medical problem and you're struggling in poverty.

There's an occupying army that holds the nation and you're just trying to get by. And you want answers because it doesn't feel like nothing is speaking to you.

Or maybe you're one of these folks who made a mistake. And what happens is you go to the synagogue and everybody tells you you're no longer welcome here. Check that guy with the withered hand. something must be wrong with you or else you wouldn't have that problem.

[22 : 24] Or you're a leper or you're a sinner who can't afford to pay your sin debt. Those sorts of things. And along comes this guy. This guy who's preaching a message of grace.

This guy who is actually healing people. Not talking about healing people but actually healing people. Guy who says no, you're welcome to stay with me.

Yeah, I know you've messed up. But you and your imperfect are still welcome here. You don't need to be perfect to be welcome here.

And so put yourself in that crowd that you're sitting at his feet or you're pressed up against the window trying to hear what he has to say.

And now he's got a choice to make because his mother and his brothers are here. What do you think the message would be if Jesus looked at all those people and said sorry I gotta go take care of this.

[23 : 48] See that's what Jesus is trying to make sure doesn't happen. What Jesus is trying to help everybody who's in that circle understand is that I love you just as much as I love them.

And that when the world comes knocking I'm not gonna walk away from you because the world wants my attention. That's his message. That's his message to all of us.

That you matter to me just as much as the world says they're supposed to matter to me. It's not that they don't matter to me it's that you do.

And that's transformational. Because if you're one of those people who's been left out if you're one of those people who is imperfect if you're one of those people who's wondering am I safe here?

That's the message he's sending to you. Yes you're safe here with me. I'm not going to let you go. I'm not gonna treat someone else as more important.

[25 : 00] I'm not going to simply walk away because there's other things to do. no you who have chosen to be here with me I am not leaving you.

Where do you feel safe? Because that's where we've gotten it wrong guys. We keep looking to the world to make us safe against the world.

hear that again. We keep looking to the world to keep us safe from the world. We put our money we put our stock we put our energy in worldly things to make us feel okay.

To make us not worry about the stuff of the world. And we have all these messages and we've been hearing this so often in recent years where it says nowhere is safe anymore.

Right? But that's because we are looking to the wrong place to be safe. When we should be looking to the someone who can truly make us safe.

[26 : 12] And not safe by the world's understanding of safe. Nancy explained it earlier. Right? Because when Jesus is with us Jesus doesn't put us in a bubble. Right?

That's not how that works. What Jesus does is I've got you. But I've got you and I'm still going to send you out there. Right?

Think about Jesus' high priesthood prayer in John 17. He says I'm not saying pull them out of the world but that you keep them safe from the evil one. That's a very different prayer. You see the idea of being safe is where am I not afraid?

Those things in the world that bother me. Those things in the world that make me feel unsafe. Do I feel better because I have a good security system? Do I feel good because I live in a gated community?

Do I feel good because I live in the right kind of neighborhood? Do I feel good because the person who I love is standing next to me? Or am I safe in Jesus?

[27 : 27] Because remember what Jesus also teaches. He says don't fear those who can kill the body. Fear the one who can destroy the soul in hell.

So if we're out here worried about the world, remember who's going to keep you truly safe. And not safe in the way that it means there won't ever be any problems or issues.

But safe no matter what those issues are. That's where we are safe. The great challenge to all of us is not simply to know that but to live that.

To not live lives of fear. To not live lives of cowardly hiding somewhere. Not to simply isolate ourselves from the rest of the world. But to be the safe place for those who aren't safe.

Truly aren't safe. To help people who are lost understand that this is where you can be safe. That's our call and our challenge.

[28 : 35] To point them to the one who can make them safe. Will we be that safe? In a world where safety is so hard to find.

That's the challenge. Because if you know where you're safe, then help build a world where everyone is safe.

Amen and amen. Loving God, thank you for the gift it is to know this truth in who you are. To know that there is a place where no matter what the world says, no matter how the world feels, we are safe.

Not safe in the way the world understands it, where there are no problems and no worries. But what happens is our worries fall away because we don't worry about the world when we are focused on you.

That as we sang this morning, we can walk out on the water, which isn't safe from the world's point of view, but you make it possible. And we're safe as long as we're focused on you.

[29 : 47] Lord God, help us to learn that, help us to live that, help us to be that in a world where there are so few people who truly understand what it means to be safe.

Following you is not easy. Following you isn't safe by the world's standards, but you will keep us safe in the ways that matter to you.

Help us to live that life, help us to bear witness to that truth, so that those who don't understand, those who are currently living in fear, those who are anxious about the worries of the world, may know what it truly means to be safe.

Amen. Indeed, there is safety in the circle. Come on down to the river and join us. it's a great place to be if you don't belong anywhere else.

Know that you can belong here. A couple of things to consider as you put your faith into practice this week. You will see a notice in here from Genesis Preschool about expanding the reach of our preschool, so give that some attention, and especially if you know someone at the appropriate age children, share it with them, because Genesis is a great place for a start.

[31 : 02] In fact, today is the end of their school year. Today is moving up day, so we want to keep Genesis in prayer. Sandy, if you don't know who Sandy is, Sandy is the one who read for us today. Sandy is going to be leading a feeding hope meal this week, so we go downtown and feed some people who are unhoused.

If you'd like to be a part of that ministry, see Sandy after service, or you can sign up or talk to me. We can also put you in touch with the right folks to get you involved. There's also an update in here from DJ.

There's also time to get signed up for volunteering and things as we look at VBS, so we have some time, but everybody knows that VBS is similar to our fish fry approach. We need all hands on deck to make VBS happen.

So if you are able to contribute in any way, please consider how you might give some of your time, some of your talent, some of your treasure to make sure our Vacation Bible School is a success. All that said, let's receive our benediction.

Loving God, we thank you that we know where we are truly safe. We also know that we have been truly saved. And so Lord, we come today celebrating you, the one who is responsible for it all, the one who makes us who we are.

[32 : 10] And so in the name of God, our King and Creator, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Redeemer, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our advocate and our sanctifier, may God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children and all God's people say, Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.