



Parish of Finchampstead and California

week 4 – from 15 March 2015

LENT WELL SPENT **... in the Name of Jesus:** **Son of Mary**

Gospel reading – Mark 3:20-21,31-35

²⁰ 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.'³¹ So his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him.

³² The crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters 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.'

Context and background

This passage comes immediately after Jesus has called the twelve apostles. He has already healed many. Evil spirits are calling him *Son of God* (3:11). Perhaps this is all too much for his family, especially in light of his argument with teachers of the law about the source of his healing power (3:23-30). So they come to take him away. Matthew (12:46-50) and Luke (8:19-21) both report this incident, but later in Jesus' ministry.

Mary is, of course, the central character in Luke's account of the birth, infancy and childhood of Jesus (1:28-2:52) whereas in Matthew she is described mainly in relation to Joseph (1:18-2:23). But after that she appears hardly at all: apart from today's reading not at all in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and in John only at the wedding at Cana (2:1-12) and at the crucifixion (19:25-27). After Jesus' ascension she is with the disciples (Acts 1:14).

Mary herself doesn't seem to be there on the one occasion when Jesus is referred to as *Son of Mary* - when his fellow-villagers at Nazareth grumbled with one another and 'took offence at him' because his preaching wasn't consistent with what they knew of him and his family (Mark 6:1-6; Matthew 13:53-58; Luke 4:16-30).

In a later discussion with his disciples after his exchange with the rich young man, Jesus again stresses the priority of following him over family and property ties (Mark 10:29-30; Matthew 19:29; Luke 18:29-30).

Questions

- 1 How plausible is it that Jesus' family would want to 'restrain him'?
- 2 How do you react to Jesus' reaction? Does his direct response to Mary at the wedding at Cana (John 2:4) throw any light on this?
- 3 What would the crowd have thought about the incident?
- 4 We're not told what happened next - what might a subsequent conversation between Jesus and his family have been like?
- 5 To what extent are you surprised how few times Mary appears in the accounts of Jesus' ministry?
- 6 In what ways is *Son of Mary* different from *Son of God*, *Messiah* and *Son of David*?
- 7 Mary has been, and in large parts of the church remains, the subject of devotion and veneration. In what ways do you find this helpful or unhelpful in your own spiritual life?
- 8 To what extent do you think Jesus was unconventional, provocative or radical in his teaching and actions? Would most Christians be happy to be described in the same way? Would you?
- 9 What are the ways in which Christian beliefs can cause difficulties within families? How are those difficulties best dealt with?

Lent Lecture - Tuesday 17 March

Jesus and Women - Rev'd Dr **Jenni Williams** is Tutor in Old Testament at Wycliffe Hall Oxford and Associate Minister at St Peter Wootton near Oxford. She has a particular interest in feminist interpretations of the Bible. She wrote *God Remembered Rachel: Women's stories in the Old Testament and why they matter* published by SPCK in 2014.

Tea and coffee will be available in St James' Church Centre from 7.45 and the Lecture will start in the hall at 8.

Other Lent Activities

Monday morning 9-10 in Church - Lent prayer (silent prayer - come and go as you please).

Monday afternoon 2-3 (SJCC) - an opportunity to explore the weekly theme in more depth.