

*20and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." 22And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." 23And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27But 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; 29but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— 30for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."*

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

I was white, he was black. I was an American, he was a Namibian. My parents, my grandparents, my great-grandparents had all been Lutheran; he was a generation away from heathen, tribal worship. In the one language we shared, English, I could speak without effort, while every sentence was a struggle for him. I owned a car; he needed a ride each week to the class at St. Thomas Aquinas Institute in Dubuque where we were taking a class on the book of Job. So it was that I shared some time with Abasai.

In every way I did and said what was appropriate. I was courteous with him – interested - reliable.

But in every way that was not visible, I was feeling superior to him. I was the greater, reaching down to assist the lesser. Not because of anything that I had done, or earned or accomplished for myself, but because of the color of my skin, and the wealth of my nation, and my being German as Luther was German. Somehow the color of my skin, and my owning a car, and my being on top along with all other Americans, somehow all of this whispered to me of God's favor for me. O, I knew God loved Abasai too, but all the blessings that I had at least hinted to me of God's special favor.

Once an angel, Gabriel by name, had greeted her with these words, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" Gabriel said, "Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor

with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." God's special favor was hers, as I sensed also it was mine.

But today we have quite a different story of Mary before us.

*Then Jesus Went home, and the crowd came together again so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it they went out to seize him for people were saying, "He is beside himself." ... And his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting about him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you." And Jesus replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother."*

On that day, having physically given birth to Jesus counted for nothing. That she had nursed him at her breast and that his brothers had shared the meals and the games and the learning of their childhood with Jesus counted for nothing. They were coming to seize him, to take him out of the public eye where people were talking. So when they called for Jesus, he said to the people sitting around him, "Here is my family. Whoever does the will of God is my mother, my sister, my brother."

Not even Mary could count on a special status with God. Those who were ready to hear Jesus on that day, to follow Jesus on that day, to do the will of God that day were more family to him than Mary herself.

Do I have special favor with God? I think of where life has led Abasai since I gave him a ride to class. He returned home to Namibia to be arrested. Then released but under constant harassment from the government that was controlled by South Africa. He was elected the President of the Namibian Council of Churches. He has risked his life and safety to declare that whoever does the will of God is a sister or a brother of Jesus, regardless of race. Does God think I am better than he because my complexion is a different shade, or because my life is more a life of ease? You know and I know that color of skin and wealth do not mean a lot to God. But doing God's will - that matters.

Yet not even Abasai can count on yesterday. Faith today, doing God's will today, these give our God joy. If Mary and Jesus' brothers had no reserve built up to cause Jesus to put them before the crowd, how could any of us? So I preached a sermon last week, or taught a Sunday school class, or mowed the church lawn. What does that mean today? So I sacrificed for my

children for twenty years, so I was a devoted wife, a fine teacher, a good catechism memorizer. What does that mean today? So I've been member of this church for thirty years, and served on the boards, gave the money to build this very building. What does that mean today?

It means that you, this very day can be Jesus true family. As you hear his word, believing and trusting and living according to his word, you are as precious to God as Mary herself, as precious to Jesus as his earthly sisters and brothers. Yesterday is gone - forget it. Today holds the possibility of you living as God's child.

Once Jesus told a parable about people hired to work in the vineyard. Some he hired at 6 am, some at 9, some at noon, some at 3pm, finally some at 5. And they all were paid the same. Now the folks who'd been around a long time didn't like that very well. "Surely we deserve more than these latecomers," they grumbled. But the owner of the vineyard said, "Do you begrudge my generosity?"

We believe and trust that Mary is honored as Jesus mother, that his brother James, first head of the church in Jerusalem, honored as his brother. But we also believe that Jesus wants to honor you in the very same way, as his mother, his sister, his brother. For he wants God's will to be done in you, that all may know that God's true family stretches across the whole world. Female and male, black and white, Hispanic and native American, Jesus hopes all will be his true family, as we do his will this day. Amen.