

Ever heard of Martha Mitchell? She was the wife of John Mitchell, who was the Attorney-General for the Nixon Administration. Well, one day while Martha was on the phone, all of a sudden the cord got ripped right out of the wall. See, she had been on the line with a White House correspondent, and details of the Watergate scandal unfolded before her, including her husband's possible involvement with the break-in. Just then, five men lunged at her and overtook Martha, leaving her in bad need of stitches. And for the next while, she was held against her will in a California hotel room. To get her to calm down, a psychiatrist forcefully sedated her.

This is the stuff of movies, I know—but it really happened. She now knew the truth about the Watergate scandal, but later try as she might Martha just couldn't get anyone to listen to her. The Nixon aids had been busy discrediting her story with a smear campaign. They told the press that she had a "drinking problem" and was having trouble in her marriage. After all, they thought, who would believe a crazy drunk with an axe to grind with her husband?

How awful that must've been for her—just think, everyone thinking you're the crazy person, when you're actually the only sane one in the room. Martha knew the truth, but no one was willing to believe her. Even her own family abandoned her over this—nobody trusting her story. And today, this has become known as the Martha Mitchell Effect. It's when a psychiatrist hears a patient's wild but true story and either mistakenly or willfully dismisses it as mere delusion.

Well, after today, maybe instead of the Martha Mitchell Effect, we could call it the Jesus Christ Effect. I mean, here in our Gospel text, Jesus gets much the same treatment. You'd think coming home after a long journey, Jesus' family would warmly greet him with open arms. "Here, son, pull up a seat, dinner's almost ready. Tell us how you've been." But instead, even His own family seems to disown Him. "Careful, everyone! Don't get too close. He's gone crazy!"

They must've heard the news of what Jesus had done just verses ago. Can you believe what He was up to earlier in Mark's Gospel! You know what kinda company Jesus was keeping? He ate with sinners and tax collectors—you just don't do that, especially not a young rabbi! Then, Jesus even dared to play God, having the gall to tell a paralyzed man his sins are forgiven! And from there, things only got worse—when Jesus calls His twelve disciples, you know who He chooses? You'll never believe this—a buncha smelly fishermen, a tax collector, and even Judas (who we all know's gonna stab Him in the back some day)! Not to mention, it looks like Jesus was breaking the Sabbath, encouraging people to skip the fast, and He even mouthed off to some of the most revered teachers of the faith. So, not only the religious establishment, but even Jesus' own family thinks there can only be one possible explanation—He's just plain lost it! He's out of His cotton-pickin' mind!

Martha Mitchell and Jesus aren't the only ones to fall victim, however—Alina Aisina has also suffered the Jesus Christ Effect. There she was, living in central Asia—her mom, dad, and sister. That is, until a Christian missionary came and shared the Good News of Jesus Christ with her mother. Ever since, everyone's thought she and her mom and sister are nuts for believing in such a God. See, she lived in a place that was dominated by Islamic nationalism, and Christianity was outlawed. And in that kinda social climate, you've got to be crazy to become a believer.

But they did—which meant that Alina suffered a lot of abuse for it—verbal and even physical—at school and also on the street. At one point, things got so bad, she even had to move to another city. But most tragic of all, was her family splitting up over it. Her father, a devout Muslim, couldn't sit back while his family apostatized to the Christian faith. So, he left, forcing his wife to work more than sixty hours a week just to make ends meet. And while he wasn't around much anymore, he'd still stop by occasionally unannounced. He'd just burst through the door and come in like a bull in a china shop. The love had gone from him—he treated them like dogs—yelling and pushing everyone around. Poor Alina—even her family, her own father, acted like she was a crazy person.

I know you know what it's like too—to experience the Jesus Christ Effect firsthand. After all, who wouldn't think we were crazy, out of our minds, had gone stark-raving mad to be followers of Jesus Christ? He's the original madman, after

all, and here we are walking in His footsteps! I mean, just think about His teachings—if you want to grow up in the Lord, you must become like a child? You win by losing, you get by giving, you live by dying? Blessed are the poor? Happy are the hungry? It's tax collectors and harlots who have first dibs on the kingdom! This is crazy-talk! People think you're looney-tunes if you say stuff like that. But I don't have to tell you—whoever you're with; coworkers, friends, even members of your own family can make you feel like you belong in a mental institution for believing what you do.

So tell me, why is it you still believe? Is it because somehow there's a strange logic to what our Savior says? Maybe it's because you know how the way of the world just isn't working. Upward mobility seems to make sense—y'know, being an autonomous, self-made, free-thinking individual, it just makes sense—that is, until tragedy hits and you realize you were never really in the driver's seat to begin with. Or sexual liberation, for some people it might sound good, but when you look at the statistics—the divorce rate, the addictions, the infanticide, the abuse and exploitation, the diseases, the number of those in counseling—there's just something that's not right. And money, fame, a career you could be proud of, that should put you on top of the world, don't you think—seems to work that way—but if Kate Spade or Anthony Bourdain could talk right now, they'd probably tell you otherwise. For us Christians, it might sound loco, but we know that Jesus' way, the illogical way of the cross, is the only way that makes any real sense. It's crazy, sure, but crazy enough that it just might work. In the end, it's the only sane choice.

Maybe that explains why you keep pressing on in the faith—or maybe it's this. Looking at the Gospel text, notice where Jesus' family is—on the outside. Notice where everyone else is—inside, crowded around Jesus. It's as if we're looking at a family portrait, everyone gathered in the living room. “Your mother and your brothers are outside, looking for you,” they tell Him. But how does Jesus respond? Putting an arm around those seated around Him, pulling them in close, Jesus says, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother!” Notice how He doesn't say, “father.” That's because Jesus is establishing a new family, one where we can all call God our “Father,” with Jesus as our brother. Those who are inside the house with Jesus are already being brought into His new family.

It's only a matter of time before Jesus plants a new family tree—the cross. There, He will draw all people to Himself—especially people like you and me. Grafting us into His holy household, He takes our sin away and makes us the pride of the family. Imagine, you and me—brothers and sisters of Jesus Himself! Sons and daughters of our Father in heaven! Ties that forever bind! Bonds that can never be broken!

It's official! At Baptism, God got His adoption papers. By the new birth of water and the Spirit, God has made you His child! And with Christ's body and blood in you, you are literally joined by blood, share the same divine DNA even. By His dying and rising, Jesus has rolled out the welcome mat for you—you now have a home in heaven. “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Jesus asks. “You are my mother and my brother and my sister!” No doubt, you are part of the household of God. Now, that explains it! Who wouldn't want that? You'd have to be a lunatic to turn down such an offer!

Despite everything going on in her life, that's what Alina Aisina thought too. Even with the abuse and the persecution, what had happened between her and her father, she knew she had something even better—a relationship with her Lord. Alina was a member of God's family.

All of that really hit home for her one Sunday in church. She, and the other children, were invited up to receive a special gift. There were these people there, and they were passing out these shoeboxes. Alina had never really known what a gift was before—there had never been enough money for her to ever receive one. But when she opened it, she found ponytail holders, hair combs, and a pair of pink plastic dress-up shoes—but perhaps the greatest gift of all was the photograph at the bottom. It was a picture of the very girl who had packed the box—this girl wore a pink tiara that matched the same shoes that Alina had received. And it was in that moment, that Alina realized that she was part of a family beyond her wildest dreams—connected to the family of God. Even on the other side of the world, Alina had a sister in Christ.

The famous preacher, Will Willimon, tells how every Wednesday the men of his church held a prayer breakfast. One morning, as he was opening with prayer, he said, "I hope you'll pray for me. I've got a busy morning. Johnny was arrested last night, picked up for DUI." At the table, everybody sighed. Now, Johnny was being raised by a single mother, was having a difficult adolescence, and here he was in jail. "So, I've got to stop by the detention center this morning," Willimon said. "I appreciate your prayers."

He was just about to move on, when a man interrupted him, "Uh, preacher, when we get done here, why don't I go along with you, 'cuz I think I know a little bit more about alcohol abuse than you do. Okay?"

Willimon said, "Sure, sounds good."

Then, another man spoke up and said, "Y'know, I feel so bad for Johnny and his poor momma. Why don't I come too?" As it turned out, four of them show up at the jail. Together, they all asked to speak to Johnny, and they were led down this labyrinth to a dark, cold cell. And there, huddled in a corner, was a seventeen-year-old, who looked like he was about five or six, weeping.

Willimon said in a gentle voice, "Johnny, we're here for you. And we want you to know that we care."

At that point, one of the laypeople moved him out of the way and said, "Johnny, c'mere. We don't just care. We're gonna do something about this. How much is your bail—how much is it gonna cost to get you out of here?"

Slowly, Johnny said, "Well, they told me it would be like a couple thousand dollars."

"Okay. Alright. We'll get it done. We'll figure it out."

Then, another man stepped up and said, "Johnny, how long you been an alcoholic?"

And Johnny stammered, "I'm not an alcoholic."

"Then let me rephrase that—how long you been lying about being an alcoholic? Y'see, I don't know much about a lotta stuff in life, but I know about this illness. I had to learn it the hard way. And I can help you escape. Now, your momma doesn't know how to raise a boy. Look, we've got a spare bedroom. When we get you bailed out of here, you can come live with us. Let's give your momma a little break here, and let's give you a break, and see if we can't put this thing back together." Willimon just stood there in awe.

Finally, this Gospel text came to mind and he said, "This is Baptism. Today, God has used you to teach me what it means to be a part of the Christian family."

Maybe you're here today, visiting for the first time. Or maybe you stopped in a long while back and never left. Either way, welcome to the family—brothers and sisters, who love you and receive you, just because of Jesus Christ. And, if you're as crazy as we are, you'll fit right in.