

Sunday May 14, 2017

Mark 3:31-35

One of his disciples reports to Jesus, saying: “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside. They are calling for you.” To which Jesus replies: “Who is my mother and who are my brothers and sisters?”

Then, pointing to those followers gathered around him, Jesus says: “Here is my mother and here are my brothers and sister. Anyone who does the will of God, who gets on board with my movement, that’s my family!”

Certainly, this must be hard to hear. For Jesus’ mother and brothers and sisters, I mean. After all, they’ve come to find him because they’re worried about him. And for good reason – people are starting to say all kinds of things about him. He’s become famous, ok – kind of a first-century rock star. But, as we all know, rock stars can go over the edge. And maybe it seems to Jesus’ family like this is what’s happening to him. Plus, the religious authorities are pretty upset by what Jesus is doing and saying. Typically, you don’t want to mess with the authorities. So for all these reasons and more, Jesus’ family comes to get him; to help him; to bring him home before things go really wrong. It seems like Jesus’ family is staging an “intervention” here. And all they get in return is this: “Who is my mother and who are my brothers and sisters?” Yeah, that had to hurt.

You’ve likely hear the saying, “Blood is thicker than water.” It means that while we may argue and even fight with our family, we’re still bound to them in ways that we will never be bound to our friends. So no matter what state of relationship we’re in with our family members, we’re still likely to do things for them that we wouldn’t do for anyone else.

Which is why Jesus’ statement both in his day and in ours, turns heads. Heck, he even turns things on their head. For, he is asserting a whole new way of relating to each other. In God’s realm, Jesus says, we are not joined to each other

by the happenstance of birth. We are not bound to each other by traditional kinship. We are not knit together primarily as a biological family. Rather, we are adopted by God in Christ. And we find our identity, kinship, and community in and through this relationship that we share in God. All who live in and work for God's reign on earth as in heaven, are family.

I'm sorry to tell you that traditional "family values" was not really a Jesus' thing. Again and again in Mark's gospel Jesus breaks down barriers and breaks the rules about who can associate with whom, inviting more and more people – and usually the most unlikely people – to join his family, his fellowship, his new community formed not by the blood of biological birth but by that water of baptism and the sweat of those willing to toil for the values and goals of the Gospel.

This means that Jesus is starting the original "blended family." He is drawing people, then and now, from all walks of life, ethnicities and backgrounds, sexual orientations and gender identities, nationalities and traditions, all into one large family, the family of God. So I guess what this means when it comes to the family of God as revealed in and by Jesus, is that "water is thicker than blood" after all.

"Who is my mother and who are my brothers and sisters?" Well, hey, according to Jesus it's you! And you! And you! And you!

This family of faith does not exist for its own sake, but to live and to work for the good of all creation. As children of God we live to love and serve all people that on earth do dwell, for all people and every person bears the image of God.

Today we remember that it is Mother's Day, and we are grateful for loving mothers whom we know and have known. We give thanks for those memories of our mothers that we cherish; and, for good memories that some of us are still

making with our moms. But even as we have much for which we are thankful, we may also carry feelings of sadness, regret, hurt, and sorrow in our hearts. Some among us would long to have been mothers, I'm sure. Others have been mothers and known the pain of loss. Still others, at this time, might be struggling in their relationship with their mothers; or, as mothers, in relationships with sons and daughters. So this is not an easy day for some; even as it is a day of celebration, and rightly so, for others who are part of our Church family.

These are some of the reasons why the Church, many years ago, began calling this "Christian Family Sunday." Because the family of faith is larger and more encompassing than our own individual families can ever be. For instance, I never knew either of my grandfathers and I lost both of my grandmothers when I was a child. Still, in the Christian family of the Church I have known, loved, been loved, and been influenced by many grandfathers and grandmothers in the faith. As well, Michele and I never did have children of our own, either by birth or adoption. Still, in being part of the Christian family of the Church down through the years we have been blessed to always have the joy of children in our lives. And we with you are pleased to celebrate Mother's Day within the church community that also celebrates Christian Family Sunday.

I recall a prayer, an evening prayer, written by one mother – Tara Seeley. She and her family joined in praying this pray at the close of each day. This is their "Evening Prayer for Families":

Our loving God,
 you gave us this,
 our own small family,
to ease our loneliness
to share our pain
to rejoice in joy

to teach us the bounty of love.

Help us give ourselves as family
to those who are lonely
to those in pain
to those whose lives
are without joy
to those who have not known
the bounty of love.

Amen.

I ask you, does this prayer not say what it is that all of us pray for our own families; and, what it is that we pray for all families everywhere?

Jesus I imagine would say, in response to such a prayer, that indeed we are his family, his sisters and brothers, when we do live and work and give of ourselves to build such a world as this for all God's children.

As well, I am reminded today of another mother who wrote her own personal creed in which she declared her own hope and prayer for her family. This mother's name was Pamela O'Brien, and this is "A Parent's Faith-filled Creed":

I want my children to be
 strong and brave,
 to do what they believe to be right
 even when it costs them a lot.

I want my children to be weak,
 to know what it means to be lonely
 and scared and vulnerable,
 to be able to cry
 and to say, "Please help me."

I want my children to love,
 to love a lot, life and other people,

especially those who
aren't very loveable;
to love buttercups
and red maple leaves
and gentle snows
and shells that cover ocean beaches
after a storm;
to love hot cider and clean floors
and great books and classical music.

I want my children to despise,
to despise a lot, pretense and lies
and killing, cruel words,
violent acts and mean tempers,
diseases that ravage the body
and the mind.

I don't want them to despise pain
and death and endings,
things that in their essence
are a part of living.

I want my children to love God
and no matter what,
no matter how dark it gets at night,
no matter what awful something
the light of day exposes,
I want them to never ever
let go of God.

I want my children
to go to bed each night,
to rise up each morning, hoping,
beyond that trusting,
beyond that believing

that God loves them,
that God will never let them go. Amen.

So may it be for all God's children and for all families everywhere –
families of every shape, size, and wonderfully diverse composition.

And as we hope and pray for the fullness of such love and tenderness, hope
and empathy to be manifest in our own and in all families everywhere, let us also
live and work for this – God's word and God's will – to be made manifest more
and more in this our McClure United Church family.

Who is my mother? Who is my father?

Who is my sister? Who is my brother?

All those who gather round Jesus Christ?

Here is my sister! Here is my brother!

Kindred in Spirit, through Jesus Christ.

Amen.