

June 10, 2018

You Are My Family

Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

I know what some of you are thinking right now. Some of you are thinking Father Greg is going to explain in a way that we can understand what blaspheming against the Holy Spirit as an eternal sin is all about. And to you I say be prepared to be disappointed. I'll save that for when Handlee is back and preaching again. Actually, I saw that, and I thought about it briefly and I thought no, because I thought something else was more important. Certainly, was more pertinent to me at this point in my life in the teaching that I had been doing for our school for ministry.

I was really caught by the response of Mary and Jesus' brothers and sisters to the situation that Jesus found himself in. He was going about his father's business. He was teaching the kingdom of God. He was healing those who were sick. He was casting out unclean spirits and a crowd had gathered so tightly around him where he was teaching that he couldn't even get away for a meal. He and his disciples. And evidently, he had been going on so long and the people were so eager for more. Some certainly didn't fully understand all that he was doing and all that he was teaching. Word was getting out, certainly from some of the scribes from Jerusalem, that he's gone out of his mind.

Sometimes that the response you get to Jesus. Either you are entranced by what he is saying and doing. You are drawing closer to him, to God.

Or you think he is out of his mind to make such claims about the kingdom of God and to be able to cast out the demons and to heal. But Mary's response is to come for her son. To try to rescue him. To try to get him to come away from that place. Come home, come where you are welcome. Come where we love you, come where we can take care of you for awhile just as you have been taking care of the crowd that is gathered around you. Come back to where it's safe. Come back to where you are welcome.

So, she and Jesus' brothers and sisters go to the place where he is teaching and of course the crowd is so thick that they can't even make their way through. The word reaches him. Your family is here. They want you to come with them. They want to embrace you and bring you back home. Come to that safe place, come to that place with warmth and comfort. They want to take care of you for a while.

Jesus response is very interesting, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Now why he leaves his sisters out, I don't know. So, I'm going to expand on that. "Who are my mother, brothers, and sisters?" He looks at the people, all of the people. The ones who are responding to his words with please give us more, tell me more, I want to be a part. To those who have their doubts even to those who are saying he has an unclean spirit. You are my brothers and sisters. You are my mother. Those who seek to do the will of God. You are the ones who are my family.

And in saying this and in doing this, I think he takes a step forward. Before he has been asked a question, what is the greatest of the commandments? And his response is you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart soul and mind and strength. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Response to that, well, who is my neighbor? And we get the great parable of the good Samaritan.

And you're familiar with the animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans about where is it proper to worship God and how do you do that. There was great disparity there, they didn't trust one another. They didn't like one another. And he tells the parable of the Samaritan being the one person who responds to the needs of this Jew who has fallen amongst thieves and had been beaten, robbed. And he says this is what is to be neighborly. To reach out to those with compassion. To reach out to those in need.

Now he is taken another step. Now the relationship is deeper than neighbor. You are my family. That very intimate relationship. Everyone who seeks to do God's will. You are my brothers and my sisters, my mother, had a father. You are the ones who are in this right relationship. In this personal relationship, with this intimate relationship. Because that's what family is.

Now all families don't necessary get along. There are families that, and I'm sure none of you, who has difficulties with family members. They have disagreements. They don't always walk the same path. They don't always agree on everything. And sometimes when the family gets together, there can be some animosity but there is always family. There is always that shared history and that shared experience. There is something that holds them together. Even though the times may be difficult. And they may not be speaking well to one another at the moment. They still have something that binds them together.

Jesus says for us as church family, as kingdom of God, that the thing that holds us together is that we seek to do the will of God. Because there all kinds of things that make us different. There are all kinds of paths that we choose to walk. That can take us apart, away from one another. But the thing that will hold us together is to try with all that we are able to do the will of God.

Now for the last two months, I've been studying the apostle Paul because I've been teaching on Paul to our school of ministry. Yesterday was my last opportunity to teach for three hours. Thanks be to God. I never realized how nervous it was going to make me to be teaching those classes. I'm glad to have done it and I'm glad that it's done. But we'd been studying about Paul trying to build community, trying to build church, trying to build family with groups that are very different from one another.

He went into the towns where there were synagogues where there were some of the Pharisee Jews and some of the Sagisi Jews, probably not too many Assyrians. They tend to separate themselves away from the others. But he would also have those proselytes, gentiles who had been drawn to the synagogues because of the teachings. He was teaching and bringing into the community called the church the gentile Cayden's who didn't share any of that history or experience of the Jews. Suddenly they were all in the mix together.

They were creating this new community called the church. They were called to be family. They had to try to understand what that meant. What is it that holds us together when we are so different in the way that we have walked up to this point. For Paul, it was Holy Spirit. For Paul it was the gospel of salvation that we hold in common that can bind us together as family even though we don't have that shared history and that shared experience. It is that baptism into the death of Jesus and into his resurrection where we live a new life where we are called to be new creation. So, that we can begin to see beyond those things that we don't share and begin living a life as family with these things that we do share.

Wasn't an easy task. There were lots of questions about how it works but it held together. In the midst of persecution, it held together as a

family. As that ideal family that support one another, that encourage one another. What we all hope and wish our families were. The core held together even in times of persecution. And we've never really gotten past how we are family when we're so different from one another. As we go through time, as the church evolves, there are always the questions of who is my family? Just as we like to keep it at arm's length and say who is my neighbor.

Our calling is to ask the deeper question who is my family and how do I relate to them when they come from such a different place. When they believe things that I may not fully understand or believe for myself. How do I embrace the other as brother or sister or mother when they look so different from me? When they speak differently from me. When they don't believe exactly as I believe, how do I embrace them as family? And the church struggles with that even today.

And Jesus gives us a clue about how we do that. As long as we are trying to do the will of God. To follow as best we can. To understand the great love of God that it took to come amongst us and embrace us. To love us in our great disparity. And so, we are called to look at one another to embrace in love those who are so different from ourselves.

That's the great call of the church. Not that we are naturally family, but that we are created family. That we choose to embrace both those who are like us and those who are different. Just like in Corinth, they began to embrace the Jew and the Gentile. The two who would not touch one another. The Jew would not touch a Gentile for fear of being unclean. Now they are brother and sister. Now they are beginning to embrace one another and see that this community is not based on the same things that the communities within the world are. The things that try to compare, separate, and divide but to overcome. To come together. To adopt one another, if you will, as God himself adopts us in baptism.

We are called to be family. And not just the family of St. Jude's. And not just the family of the diocese of the Central Gulf Coast. And not just the family of the Episcopal church USA. Not even, just the family of the Anglican communion. We are called to include and invite everyone. To come and know and hear and understand and try to follow the will of God. Because the will of God is to love and to care. To be compassionate, to be seek justice, to seek mercy for all people. That is a family that we have chosen to join. That is the family that we invite others to be a part of.

Rector – Gregory Hein

Transcriptionist – Renee' Evans

Please be advised that this sermon currently catches me up from being out of town. There was no sermon from June 17, as it was from Child Advocacy Center, but I will continue on for next week on Sunday the 24th.

Thank you so much for your patience!

Renee' Evans