

"A New Family"

Mark 3:31-35

June 10, 2012

2nd Sunday After Pentecost

It is generally agreed up that “family” is your closest and most important relationship or it should be. We will do almost anything for our family. We will sacrifice almost anything for our family. We will schedule every other event around our family’s schedule. Family even trumps church. I hear people say, “I couldn’t come to worship because we had family coming in.” Or, people will say they can’t come to Bible Study because of this or that event on their child’s academic or sports’ schedule. This is not said with any embarrassment or shame. It is taken for granted. Family reigns supreme.

This is exactly what Mary, the mother of our Lord, was counting on in our text for today. She and her other children came to Jesus, expecting special treatment, because they were family. They had come to seize Jesus because they thought He was out of His mind. Although the text doesn’t say why they thought this, scholars speculate that it might be because He was too dedicated to His ministry and was neglecting some of His responsibilities as the eldest son at His home in Nazareth. Or, it was because He was acting as if He was the Messiah. Either way, they thought Jesus was deluded in His thinking.

The family delegation arrives to find Jesus teaching in a house that was so packed that they couldn’t even eat. So, Jesus debated the religious leaders from Jerusalem and taught the people. His mother and brothers stood outside the house and sent for Jesus. They expected Him to come out to them because family was more important than His religious activities. He should do what His family wanted instead of what His mission required. This was not said with embarrassment or shame. It was taken for granted. Family reigned supreme.

But Jesus does not drop what He is doing to rush out to His earthly family. He does not rearrange His schedule to meet the needs of His mother and brothers. He doesn’t reject His earthly

family. He doesn't say family is bad or unimportant. He doesn't even say that the needs of the family should be ignored and not taken care of.

Jesus says that something has superseded the family in importance in the Kingdom of God. It is not that the earthly family will be unimportant. Something will be more important though. Jesus asks, "Who are my mother and brothers?" The rhetorical question implies that true family is not based on a physical relationship with people. Jesus looks around to those sitting around Him, listening to the Word of God and says, "*Here* are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." Family in the Kingdom of God is based on a spiritual relationship with the will of God.

In the old family, you do not choose to become part of a family. You enter a physical family by being born into it. You have a father who begets you and a mother who gives you birth. Your parents raise you and your siblings by feeding you and supplying your needs; by teaching you and encouraging you; and by supporting you and protecting you. This, in turn, produces love and loyalty in you for your parents and for your brothers and sisters.

The new family is much the same way. You did not choose to be a part of this family, either. In fact, you were born apart from the family because of sin. You were adopted into the family of God with the adoption costs being paid by your older brother, Jesus Christ. He paid for your sin by offering His life on the cross as payment. He gained for you life – eternal life – when the Father raised Him from the dead three days later. That adoption was sealed in you personally in your baptism. The Holy Spirit took up residence in you, creating faith, that you might do the will of God which is to trust in His Son, your Brother, Jesus Christ.

You have a heavenly Father who begot you and holy mother Church which gave you new birth in Holy Baptism. Here the family comes together. Here, the Father feeds and supplies our needs through the meal established by our older brother, Jesus, which we share around His table – the Lord's Supper. Here, our Father speaks to us, teaching and encouraging us through His Holy Word. Here, we bring our petitions for support and protection to our Father who is only too happy to hear and grant according to His will for the sake of His Son, our Brother, Jesus Christ.

To say that this new family supersedes our earthly family is *not* to say that our earthly families are unimportant or to be ignored or forgotten. Our earthly families are good gifts of God. They are to be honored as something instituted by God. They are to be enjoyed as blessings given by God. Jesus did both of these things within the context of His human family.

Our new family which is also instituted by God and a blessing of God surpasses our earthly family in importance and priority. First, while our earthly families provide for our physical and emotional needs (both of which are very important), our new family provides for that which is even more important: our spiritual and eternal needs. Our earthly families provide us with nutrition and support for this life. Our new family provides us forgiveness, peace, and hope for the life which is to come.

Secondly, all earthly families will eventually break up: by divorce, desertion, or death. The family of God is the only family that will always be there. Sin breaks up earthly families. Yet, although God's family is made up of sinners, it is, by God's grace and doing, the holy Christian Church, the community of saints. Earthly families are not always there for us. The family of God will always be there for us. God's Word will always be there for you. His sacraments will always be there to give you life and strengthen life. Nothing can break that up. The devil can't break that up. Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." (Matthew 16:18) Death can't break it up. Death ends our families here on earth. However, the family of God of which we are a part now continues through death and past death and lasts forever.

Given all of that, where should our priorities be? Jesus never asks us to give up our earthly families. He never gave up being a part of His earthly family. Even as He hung, dying on a cross, Jesus performed the duties of the oldest son in an earthly family by providing for the care of His earthly mother, Mary, in the home of the disciple John. What Jesus calls us to (and models for us in our text) is a new priority. Our true and lasting family is not based on a blood relationship but on a spiritual relationship and thus *that* family is our highest priority.

I think we have trouble with this because we view the church as an institution populated by members and offering programs which may or may not interest us rather than seeing the Church as a family where we come with our brothers and sisters to fellowship with our Father, our older brother Jesus, and with one another. When viewed this way, our coming together for worship, Bible Study, or any other activity is not seen as an institutional activity which is then ranked somewhere in our priorities according to how useful or interesting it might seem to us individually. Rather, our coming together for worship, study, service or fellowship is a family “get together” which is of the utmost importance to us simply because it is a family event. We support it because it’s family, whether or not we enjoy it or benefit from it individually. You don’t skip Christmas dinner because mom’s a bad cook. You don’t miss your son’s concert because your favorite television show is on. You don’t avoid your daughter’s birthday party because you have a big game. If it’s family, you’re there.

The Church after Jesus’ ascension into heaven got this. In Acts 2, it reads

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. (Acts 2:42-47a)

And what happened when the church functioned as a family rather than as an institution and showed it, not by words and appearances, but in their commitment and care for one another? That section of Scripture concludes by saying, “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47b) Look beyond the physical and see family as Jesus sees family. Who are our mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers? Here are our mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers. Amen.