

August 14 2016

Scripture Lesson

Psalm 80: 1-3, 8-19

Sermon: *“Do You Want a New Family?”*

Luke 12:49-56

Tough words from Jesus on this pleasant summer Sunday Day: “I came to bring fire---Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No I tell you, but rather division!” I’ve come to disturb and disrupt your family.

It is an old ploy, but many a college professor has begun a class by reading a letter from a parent to an official. The parent complained that his once obedient and well-motivated son had become involved in some weird religious group. The group had completely taken over his life, forced him for sake all of his friends, and turned him against his family. The parent was pleading with the official to intervene and take action against this obviously disruptive group that had caused such difficulty in this person’s family.

Then the professor asks the question of his students, “What is this letter about?”

A typical class response might be that they thought it was a letter probably concerning a kid who had gotten mixed up the Moonies, hira krishna or some other controversial sect.

Most classes are astounded when it is revealed to them that the letter was a composition taken from a number of letters written by a third century Roman parent’s complaining about a weird religious group called Christians.

We sometimes forget that one of the chief Roman criticisms of Christians was that Christians were perceived as anti-family, turning children against their parents and encouraging wives to be disobedient to their husbands. No institution was more beloved in imperial Rome than the family. The family determined one’s social and economic destiny. There was almost nothing that classical Romans would not do for their families. The church they believed assaulted the institution of the Roman family.

Thumb through the Bible looking for material on “family values’ and you will have a rough go of it. The Old testament is definitely more helpful than the new in this regard. There, family means a great deal-though virtually nothing outside the family on the text of the people of Israel. And yet one would be hard pressed to find supportive material in the rather sordid accounts of family life among the patriarchs and matriarchs of Genesis. The Book of Ruth? No help there. The Song of Solomon? No, I said we were looking for material on families not raw sex.

Moving right along to the New Testament, matters get worse for the family. Here is Jesus, with almost nothing being said about his family. On the few

occasions, after his early childhood in Luke (the rest of the gospels appear to know absolutely nothing of Jesus' childhood and family) whenever Jesus' family enters, it is usually in a rather unflattering way. Jesus makes it quite clear that his family does not consist of his biological brothers and sisters, or even his mother. Then he proceeds to go about Galilee asking people to leave their families and follow him.

Not only does Jesus appear to have no family responsibilities himself, but he makes explicit attacks upon marriage and the family. In Luke 14: 26 Jesus will say, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes and even life itself, cannot be my disciple." Jesus must have broken a lot of families' hearts in Israel. And don't quote that passage from Ephesians 5 either. After talking about the mutual duties of wives to obey their husbands and husbands to love their wives, Paul ends by saying that all this is mainly material related to Christ and his church, not marriage in the first place.

Your human family, for all of its strengths, is not enough to make you a disciple. Therefore, the church has found it helpful to take you out of your family, to adopt you, to baptize you, thus placing you within a much more expansive experience of family, namely the church. In the church, you are encouraged to call people who would have been strangers, "sister" and "brother." So the church really does believe in something called "family values" but not in the sense that we have been using the term for the past few years. We, the church, believe in the family, the family of God and the way the family is born is not through natural regeneration. Baptism.

Here is a "family" that knows no social, economic, racial, or political boundaries. Here is a family in which your grandparents don't live "over the river and through the woods" but rather in Jerusalem. These saints, now your parents in the faith, show you the way. So we do not believe in "family values"; we believe in baptism.

If I stopped today's sermon right here, and as people left the service they told me, "Good sermon" or "that's the way to tell it," I might wonder, "How much do you hate your parents?"—But when I think about it. I know, it is not that people dislike their families, it is that people are often, "Just so disappointed" with the families we have. Divorce, alcoholism, drugs, laziness all may affect our children, our parents, our brothers and our sisters. We are heartbroken over the way our families have turned out. We are not speaking to each other, we are sharing things told to us in confidence with third parties, we are fighting over who gets grandmother's china, or telling each other, "Mom always liked you best!" Disappointment is a leading feeling within families.

I think that we Christians make a big mistake to keep attempting to only pump up the American family. The American family is in big trouble. Rampant capitalism, a less compassionate government, unchecked affluence, grinding

poverty, irresponsible parents, disintegrating public schools are all working to destroy what we have known as the family. But perhaps this gives the church a marvelous opportunity to rediscover baptism.

We do not believe in 'single parent' families. Neither do we believe in 'two parent' families. We believe in something called baptism whereby we adopt people, of all different ages, and put them in a family much richer, more diverse and interesting than the family they would have been in had they not been baptized. We believe in the family of God, the church.

There is a song, a 70s song, once performed by Sister Sledge, I believe. Even though this song has been co-opted by another group. I think it could be our song. The song is "We are Family." It should be our song because we are family, all believers in Jesus Christ are part of the family of God. Amen