

“Called to Be . . . Jesus’ Family”

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)
Sixth in a periodic series, “Calling Ourselves Names”

Mark 3:10-21,31b-35

October 23, 2016

I

Family Matters

Come in, Come in and sit down, You are a part of the f . . . fam . . . family. How does that sound to you? Does the idea that this bunch is your family appeal? Maybe family has been tough for you, so this holds a promise of something you’re looking for? Or, did you want to run screaming for the exits?

The past few years, usually on Anniversary Sunday, I’ve looked at different things we call ourselves. I mean how this herd of people, assembled by the Holy Spirit, gets described in the Bible. For instance, we are a *koinonia*, a community that shares life together. We are an *ekklesia*, a gathering to do public business. We are a bride, married to Jesus. We are a heavenly choir. We are an embassy, representing Jesus to the world.¹ And today’s topic: we are an *oikos*, a household. A family.

I will not raise “family” onto a pedestal, a Soviet-era statue to ideological cheerfulness. I’ve spent enough time with enough of you, and others, and myself, to know that “family” is complicated. Many of our wounds come from our family. Families can be constricting and insular. Families can be places of terrible hurt. Families can be conflicted and stressful. And “Family” gets used to push people out: singles, sole-parents, gay and lesbian families. Even *The Brady Bunch* had a struggle to fit in.²

Still . . . “family” holds something for us. Family is belonging, just because you do. Family is being profoundly shaped by these people you did not choose. Family is cousin Ernie showing up at Grandma’s birthday party without calling ahead, all of us knowing his messy story, and welcoming him. It’s never perfect. Still, “family” holds us.

II

Family was Everything

We’ll hear the Bible reading in a moment. First, you need to know that in Jesus’ time, family was everything.³

We’re talking about the *oikos*, the household-family family.⁴ This was father, maybe his

¹ The previous sermons in this series are: “Sharing Life” (October 21, 2012), “A Public Display” (October 20, 2013), “Jesus Gets Married” (March 23, 2014), and “A Heavenly Choir” (October 19, 2014), and “An Embassy” (October 18, 2015).

² “While Mike Brady is depicted as being a widower, [series creator] Schwartz originally wanted the character of Carol Brady to have been a divorcée but the network objected to this. A compromise was reached whereby Carol’s marital status (whether she was divorced or widowed) was never directly revealed.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Brady_Bunch

³ For what follows, see Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 21, 36-53.

⁴ In Hebrew, *bēt ’āb*.

parents, his wife (or wives), adult sons and their wives, young children, unmarried adult daughters, and, if they were wealthy, workers. They all lived in the same house, or a family compound of homes. Your household-family mattered most, more than your so-called “nuclear family” (parents and children).

The household-family was your workplace, your employer, your school, your primary place of worship. It owned your land. It kept you in line. It decided your career. It determined who you married. It was how everyone saw you, and how you saw yourself.

“Honour your father and your mother!” It’s the commandment between “keep Sabbath” and “don’t murder.” Bring honour to them, to your family. Family is everything.

Forget equality. In the household-family, father was number one. Number two was the oldest son. When Dad died, Eldest Son got most of the wealth, and inherited responsibility for the family. Especially, responsibility for his mother.⁵

As we hear today’s Scripture, remember the household-family was everything, children must bring honour to their parents, and the duties of the oldest son. In his family, that was probably Jesus.

Jesus had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons....

Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.” . . .

continued . . .

⁵ See Kenneth E. Bailey, [The Cross and the Prodigal](#) (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 46.

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Mark 3:10-15,20-21,31b-35
(New International Version)

III *Family Scandal*

Jesus had family issues . . . once again showing that he knows our sorrows!

They stage an intervention. Dad is not leading the group, so we can assume Joseph has already passed away. Which means Jesus is not doing his eldest-son job. He is not overseeing his family. He is not providing for his family. (There is little money in the wandering-messiah business, and not much of a future, either.) He is not looking after his mother!

Instead, Jesus is causing trouble. He is hanging around the wrong sort of people. He is making enemies of respectable, important people. He is healing without license. He is talking about demons, and some are saying he is in league with them. Loud whispers are spreading. What do you think this is doing to the honour of Jesus' family?

Maybe we can give them a bit of a break. No other family has ever had to share the toothpaste with the Son of God (so to speak). Though Jesus isn't home enough to do that either.

They think Jesus is crazy. I imagine they are angry at him, and worried about him, because they love him. They've come to bring him back. That's what family does.

IV *Jesus Creates a New Family*

He says, “No!” Jesus says they are not his family.

I hope we can imagine how shocking and scandalous this is. If family is everything—and even in our fragmented-family times, family is so much—then what Jesus is saying and doing here changes so much.

Jesus is creating a New Family. His New Family is not defined by blood or birth. His New Family is not formed by processes of adoption or marriage.

It’s not that he gets rid of the old families or households. They can still be important and vital, healthy and helpful. But now, with Jesus, they are not everything. Not any more.

“*Who are my mother and my brothers?*” Jesus asks. Who do I belong to? Who am I responsible to? And, as the oldest, who am I responsible for? Jesus asks this, and then he answers.

“*Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.*”

Jesus’ New Family are those who are committed to discovering together, and living together, God’s will: God’s plans, God’s purposes, God’s patterns, God’s story.

If that’s us, if we belong to Jesus’ New Family, then the name that shapes us most is not our last name, but his name. We are products no longer of the branches of our ancestry tree, but because we are now branches of Jesus, the True Vine.⁶ Our mother issues no longer control us, our father issues no longer dominate us, our sibling rivalries no longer provoke us. Of course these things still affect us. We still need to work on them.

But they don’t have to be everything, anymore. Not when we belong to Jesus’ New Family.

V *New Family Because of Jesus*

At the start, I said I do not want to put “family” on a pedestal. Let’s not put this New Family of Jesus on a pedestal, either. After all, Jesus “*appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them.*” These were the first into his New Family. Of these, one would betray him, another deny knowing him, all of them abandon him. They routinely missed the point, messed up, and proved remarkably inept. Jesus New Family is made up entirely of folks like them!

And folks like us!

⁶ John 15.

Be around us long enough, and we will disappoint you. We will do things you do not like. We will say the wrong thing. We will get on each others nerves. We have a family story, and sometimes it is not pretty. That's family. Jesus' family is divided. Parts of the family are hardly on speaking terms. We have good feuds, and bad ones too! That's family.

Don't worry. You will disappoint us too. We will still love you. That's family.

What makes this family work is not the people who make it up.

It works because Jesus brings us together. He makes us his family.

I know this is hard to get, because ours is a culture that craves choices. We are told we can choose for ourselves. But you don't get to choose the family you are from: your old family, Jesus' New Family.

Jesus said, *"You did not choose me. I chose you."*⁷ And he chooses this family, these wacky brothers and sisters here, and in other congregations, and branches, and around this world, to be your New Family. He is using your New Family to shape you. You will discover who you truly are in Jesus. He chooses this family so we discover it together. I need you. We need each other. We are Family.

⁷ John 15:6.