

This is Father's day, and this morning's gospel story I think relates in very interesting ways! On days like Mother's Day, or Father's Day, we often try to get together with our families of origin, or for many of us there is no family still alive or close by, so we think of spiritual family. Sure, it is a time for us to think of our own fathers and grandfathers, or also a time to think of the younger generation... how have we been a father, or what examples of fathering have we seen among our friends and relatives, for better or for worse. Take a moment to ponder the best examples of fatherhood that we know of, and pray for better fathering all across our world!

This morning, I'm actually leaning toward another theme about family that is prevalent in Jesus' stories and in today's gospel reading. It would seem as if Jesus disses his own biological family (disparage, disrespect, dismiss, discount, etc!)

We remember that when his mother Mary asked him to find more wine, he says, "What have you to do with me?" ... And when Mary and Joseph were searching for him, they found him in the Temple with the Rabbis, and he said to them, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" And now in today's reading, his mother and siblings are trying to get his attention, and he dismisses their call for attention, he let's them keep waiting outside, and says "*These* are my mother and my brothers!" "All those who do the will of God are my family," he says.

Jesus once said, "If you love only those who love you back, (like your immediate family)...what good is that?" Jesus was always pushing us to love the stranger, the outsider, even an enemy. Jesus was knew and taught that there is far more to being "family" than blood and biology!

So at this point, since we have already paused to think of our father or grandfather or fathering, we have an opportunity to ponder Jesus' emphasis on *spiritual family*. Let's take a moment of silence to think of anyone who has been like a father, like a mother, like a brother or like sister to us.....

These people are part of our family. They are spiritual family, which in many cases can be closer than our biological family. I was lucky to have had a really good father (and mother), who taught me and modeled for me a lot about love, but I also feel quite blessed to have had many people in my life with whom I connect on a spiritual level... with whom I connect with deep levels of trust and love. Many of these I have met through the Christian church, but I know for sure that I have many brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers of differing faith or even no faith. Jesus' said his family is made up of those "who do God's will." This would include people of other faiths and no faith. In the Buddhist path, some proclaim a God, a supreme power, but many simply speak of spiritual "practices." I'm not sure exactly where the Dalai Lama falls in the Buddhist spectrum, but we've heard him say many times, "My religion is simple; my religion is kindness," which Christians might call "gracious love."

One commonly used saying is "we are brothers from different mothers." These are people that we could easily call "brother" (or sister!), people you just easily click with! We know that this has often happened in the church (and we followers of Jesus do hope and trust that we are very likely to find friendly, kind and loving people in Christian churches(!) ... When I was at Princeton Seminary, I worshipped often in a black church, felt very welcome, and heard them often saying brother so and so, sister so and so. I

think it is harder for white folk, or perhaps I should just speak for myself: for us *reserved* white folks with English blood.

Our extended spiritual family can be in groups outside the church, of course. Coffee groups, swim club folks, book clubs, foreign language conversation groups, soccer moms and dads, etc. But inside the church, we feel that the possibility to be true family is very high! As levels of trust deepen, safely, ... then we can truly think of a church community as The Beloved Community. All is based on love and on members trying to hone our skills in love, trying to listen more than speak, understand more than be understood, console more than be consoled, to paraphrase the Prayer of St Francis.

I have come to agree with the idea that Jesus was quite a radical in many ways. His love was surely radical. He spoke with a prophetic voice. So in our gospel lesson, Jesus is challenging the traditional notion of family; if Jesus were here today, he might say: "What's with this "family values" movement? To be a "family," are you saying that you need to have a father, a mother, two children, and a dog? I think Jesus would be well aware and inclusive of families of different make up, and emphasize the "values" part of family... the most important value being "do you love one another?" And with Jesus, we are not talking about just the feelings of love, but that important Christian word Agape... meaning self-giving love, even sacrificial love. Whoever it is that is sharing a home, do they give of themselves to help the other and to help their neighbors and society?

We have a singer coming this afternoon Crys Matthews, that I believe will talk quite a bit about *new ways* of being family. She will talk about love and hope, about trying to change things for the better. Surely there is still much prejudice, hatred and discrimination

in our world. Thus a remedy will always involve change. One of Cry's now-famous songs is entitled ChangeMakers. Sounds like another word for *Social Activists*... another word for *prophets*, like Jesus.

Cry is called a singer for social justice... this kind of "justice" has little to do with judgment and punishment, though it can mean stopping behaviors that are hateful or discriminatory. When oppression and discrimination are stopped, then social justice has to do with aiming to make level playing fields and equal opportunities for all, as best we can. Cry, the daughter of a minister, says it is her mission "to amplify the voices of the unheard, to shed light on the unseen, and to be a steadfast reminder that hope and love are the truest pathways to equity and justice." Isn't that beautiful and Jesus-like: Not anger, not violence, but Hope and Love are the best pathways for social change!

One of her lyrics is "There's a color *just for you* in this rainbow." It underscores that we all are created unique, loved as a child of God... or as Psalm 139 says, "I praise you, because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Each and every one of us, as a child of God, needs to grow into our true self, which we do best when we know we are part of a loving community, that looks beyond outward appearances and stereotypes and "looks to the heart" as prophets have said.

Each looks to the heart of the other. This is true love, spiritual family. Where are my brothers and sisters? *Here* are my brothers and sisters! One of our church "mothers" requested this song, "You Raise Me Up." Many of you raise *me* up, since pastors can have low times, and also need encouragement from spiritual family.... (Ross and Lance sing "You Raise Me Up.")