



“What Is Family?”

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Scripture (ERV):

Mark 3:31-35

Jesus' Followers Are His True Family

³¹ Then Jesus' mother and brothers came. They stood outside and sent someone in to tell him to come out. ³² Many people were sitting around Jesus. They said to him, “Your mother, your brothers, and your sisters ^[b] are waiting for you outside.”

³³ Jesus asked, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” ³⁴ Then he looked at the people sitting around him and said, “These people are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ My true brother and sister and mother are those who do what God wants.”

Sermon:

Many social scientists say that family is the basic building block of community. Family is found in every culture, and across time as far as our human records go.

But what constitutes family is diverse across time and culture.

It is far beyond the Norman Rockwell picture that we are often presented with: white people gathered around a table with a turkey on it; mom and dad, grandparents and little children.

Family is far greater: it is what society needs, and family is what humankind needs.

Societies and governments may see it as a stabilizing force, bringing diverse folks together, and creating helpful networks of support, and providing communities of workers.

Reproducing a population lost to warfare, conquest and disease.

Or the governments may not care about family at all. They may tear families apart at an invisible border, as they are doing right now in the United States; or they may legislate the number of children, creating a lost generation of baby girls, as they do in China. They may deny parental rights to women who don't have men in the home with them, or they may deny them to same-sex couples who long for a child, or children. Governments around the world bomb their own children, put them in cages, let them get massacred in their schoolrooms.

Governments are callous and fickle and too often, cruel. I would say they DO NOT create family, nor do they support them generously.

1. Family, I think, is created by and for love, for healing, wholeness, maturation and development towards fullness of life.
2. Families build up human beings rich in love and compassion, in learning and growing, in exploring and expanding, in reaching for the unknown in curiosity and delight.
3. Families teach respect and honor and humility, care of the creation, of oneself, of all who walk the earth, swim, fly or crawl upon it, under it, above it.
4. Family is indeed, what societies need, and what humankind needs.

But we don't need a narrow definition of family. We need a BIG expansive notion of what family is!

We don't need patriarchy in our families.

We don't need domination, physical abuse, violent emotional pain, and psychological wounding in our families.

We don't need what too many of us have felt: love that is conditional upon certain behaviors, keeping certain secrets, looking and acting in certain acceptable ways, denying our own understanding and being dominated by some other understanding that feels like a lie.

And here we have Jesus:

His family thinks he has perhaps lost his mind. vs. 21 says so.

They come and tell him to “come out”. Honestly, I think they are coming to get him. It’s just a nice way of saying, they’ve come to shut him up, close him down, put him in the attic, or the basement, or someplace where they can control him.

Jesus, in the short few chapters before this story, has been busy upsetting everyone and everything around him; he has been eating with the wrong kind of people, he has been creating a community of friends and followers, and he has been casting out evil spirits among the people...there are so many kinds of evil spirits in this world: spirits of greed and violence, spirits of cruelty and racism and homophobia and transphobia, misogyny, white supremacy. Jesus sends the evil spirits packing and then eats with these people, and all people. He talks to people who are filled with suffering, who are outcast because of illness...he sees them and comforts them and restores them to community. He pisses off the smart ones who are supposed to have all the answers, because the people are more excited by his actions and teaching than they are with the-know-it-alls...

So, his family are coming to get him, silence him, shut him down. In the gospel of Mark, Mary is no sweet virgin mama, and his brothers (and sisters) are not his support system. Mary has brought the men of the family to deal with Jesus. Wherever it happens, whenever that happens; that is not my understanding of family. You can call it social enforcement, just don’t call it family.

Jesus thinks so, too. So he looks around at the people who have been sharing his life with him, his work, his talk, his heartache and his meals, and probably his laundry, too: and THEY are his family.

It’s not blood. It’s not heritage. It’s not cultural control, estates, lineages, birth order or any of that:

Family is created by care. Family is created by sharing food, and values. Family is created by sitting with one another in trauma, in sickness, in the dark of despair.

Family is created by holding one another up as beautiful, as worthy, as wonderful!

Family is supporting one another in the new endeavor, the great adventure, the beautiful chance to grow, to blossom.

Family is hard work, telling the truth in love, discipline, and consequences!

Jesus looked around and saw and named this truth.

Look around your life and find your family.

Celebrate them. Thank them for being yours!

Create family, wherever you are.

Be a family to others.

Let church be a part of your family, and if they are not acting like family, then demand that they start!

Jesus is a builder of the bigger reality of family: family in love, family in care, family without mental or physical violence. Family in healing, family in forgiving, family in celebrating.

Let's work on building family right here at Westminster, and in every place we go...it will change the world.

Yes, it will.