

## STRUGGLING WITH FAMILY TIES

Pentecost 3-B June 10, 2018

Genesis 3:8-15; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35

What's the most shocking thing you heard in this morning's readings? Was it the image of God taking an evening stroll through the garden? Was it the man blaming God because "the woman you gave me" got him in trouble? Was it the Apostle Paul's proclamation that even though things in this life can get pretty terrible, God already has a plan for a "more secure" dwelling place for us?

Was it Jesus' family, wanting to restrain him (that is, keep him basically under house arrest), since they too thought he was losing his mind? Was it Jesus, first telling us that no sin, no blasphemy was unforgivable; but then suggesting that blaspheming the Holy Spirit was to be "guilty of an eternal sin." Or was it when Jesus abruptly set aside his own family with the question, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"

A long time ago, a dear friend of mine said: "You just can't put God in a box." In other words, we can't draw a big outline around the God we think fits our expectations and preferences. Last week, our gospel reading reminded us that Sabbath was created for humanity, not the other way around. In other words, if we are intent on keeping "the letter of the law" to the point of neglecting or ignoring someone in need, then we just don't get the whole point of the law—which is a gift God gives to help us live in relationship with one another.

When we encounter rule-breaking in the Genesis passage, the real issue around this tale about disobedience was not as much about the action of those first people as much as it was about their refusal to accept responsibility for their actions. In reality, the man and the woman are equally guilty because "...both human responses portray blaming as the first step in a downward spiral." [Troy M. Troftgruben, "From a Scholar" in *Sundays and Seasons: Preaching 2018*, p. 181.] As we've seen in family relationships, work environments, and the political arena, "passing the buck" is a weak and cowardly response based on our own plucking from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We attempt to be *like God* (the very suggestion of The Tempter in the garden) by trying to cast ourselves as perfect and blameless.

When the scribes and the townspeople and even Jesus' own family tried to dissuade him from the work of teaching and healing and performing other signs, some among them accused Jesus of performing the devil's parlor tricks: more specifically being possessed by an evil spirit. But Jesus was quick to inform them that the powers of evil are incapable of casting out evil: If you are seeing amazing signs and wonders, they can only be *of God*; any accusation otherwise denies God's singular power over all.

Of course *the powers that be* were none too thrilled, both with his reaching outside of the "box" to heal the marginalized (read that: ostracized) of his society; and with his reinterpretation of the law to lift restoration and wholeness to immediacy above peoples' sense of order, and the religious leaders sense of authority.

Dr. David Lose [Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church, Minneapolis] rightly observes that the leaders and others felt "robbed of their ability to judge and fence in (or out) and define those around [them] by how they conform to [their] expectations." "In fact...anytime we draw a line between who's in and who's out, we discover Jesus on the other side, identifying with them, caring for them, and loving them...just as he loves us."

Lose reminds us: “[Jesus] will pay a price for this. Those upset by his radical embrace and outlandish love will conspire, threaten, and eventually entrap and crucify him. And none of that will deter him. He will die unjustly in order to demonstrate God’s crazy love. And on the third day, God will raise him from the dead.”

In a radical departure from many Christians’ interpretation of why Jesus was crucified, Dr. Lose further suggests that this “may just mean that the cross has next to nothing to do with paying some price, or being punished in our stead, or satisfying God’s justice, but rather is the example of just how far we will go to get rid of those who witness to God’s expansive and all-encompassing love; and the resurrection is ultimately the testimony that that kind of love can simply not be stopped, not even by extreme violence, and so will eventually conquer all.” [David Lose, “In the Meantime...” [www.davidlose.net](http://www.davidlose.net), posted June 7, 2018]

That suggests that Jesus died for our sins, not because God demanded a price to balance the scales, but rather that humanity in its sinful desire to be “like God” took law and punishment into its own hands in an attempt to forever silence that which they (we) could not control.

And in the ultimate act of proclaiming Good News, Jesus overturns the idea that “blood is thicker than water,” when he asks and answers the question: “Who are my mother and my brothers? Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” Those of us who believe that Jesus is the embodiment of God’s Good News meet him and are joined to him in the water of baptism. Church fathers Ambrose and John Chrysostom believed “Family is created in the font, the womb of the church.” [“Ideas for the Day,” *Sundays and Seasons 2018*, p. 205. See also: *Infant Baptism: A Parish Celebration* by Timothy Fitzgerald. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994, p. 82]

If the font is where real family is created, we honor the God who has been revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by following the radical example of Jesus: enlarging the circle of inclusion, rather than drawing lines that divide and borders that shut out. The promise that we may have life in all of its fullness means that we can reach out in every direction know that we are touching fellow children of God and even many companions on The Way.

The same God who looked over his entire creation and called it “good” still sees that goodness in each one of us. God’s goodness will have the last word over every evil, over light and darkness, and even over the last enemy, death itself. So, rejoice: You have already been claimed as God’s own. You are *family*. Amen.