

THE CHURCH AS FAMILY
Matthew 12:46-50

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When God made you and God made me, He made us a part of a family. He gave us grandmas and grandpas, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles and lots of others. For when God made you and God made me, He made us a part of a family.

When Jesus spoke of family, he extended it far beyond blood lines and DNA. He called the entire Christian Community a family, the family of God. I want to use that metaphor to call us to communion today. The Church is the family of God. *Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.* Matthew 12:50 We are family.

WE BELONG TO THE SAME PARENT

Paul says in Ephesians 3:14-15 *For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.*

When she turned 21, Tammy Harris from Roanoke, Virginia began searching for her biological mother. After a year she had not succeeded. What she didn't know was that her mother, Joyce Schultz, had been trying to locate her for 20 years. According to the Associated Press, there was one more thing that Tammy didn't know. Her mother was one of her co-workers at the convenience store where she worked. One day Joyce overheard Tammy talking with another co-worker about trying to find her mother. Soon they were comparing birth certificates and they discovered that they were mother and daughter having been working side by side for a number of years. When Joyce and Tammy discovered they were in fact mother and daughter, they fell into each others arms and held on for the longest time.

We have a heavenly parent. Whether or not it is clear to us, we have been searching for him all of our lives. Beware, your Heavenly Father is closer than you think. Embrace him. Claim him. Come home to your family, the family of God.

What I enjoy most about Baptism is its symbolism of claiming. God is saying in the sacrament of Baptism, this is one of mine, handle her with care, treat him as you might treat me. Oh I know, critics tell us babies don't know what's going on. As they squirm and cry at Baptism how can they be deciding the future of their faith? I say since when did you decide to be born. How is it you determined the faith or lack of it you were taught as a child? Before the age of accountability we were nurtured toward maturity and given the moral framework that will shape our lives for eternity. Welcome to the family. We are claimed by God and whether or not it is clear to us God has chosen us. And today we have an

opportunity to choose him. We are family because we have a common parent. We are family.

J. J. Packer once said, “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, he does not understand Christianity very well.”

WE LIVE IN THE SAME HOUSEHOLD

Ephesians 2:19 *You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.*

Paul Tournier said years ago, “We all need a place, we need somewhere to be.” Even though it’s technically not true, I understand our tendency to use a personal possessive pronoun to describe Church spaces. This is my church, my Sunday School Class, my pew, my parking place. We’ve had members ask guests to move because you are sitting in my pew—hardly an act of hospitality, something you would not think of doing at home but tend to do at Church.

Families are strange and wonderful and dangerous things. Family creates our greatest potential for love and our greatest possibility for conflict. There is nothing like family coming to your aid in a time of need. However nobody can hurt you more than a member of your own family.

As the Family of God, we are called to share the same household.

In 1991 our family moved from Lexington to Louisville to assume a new pastorate. It was not an easy move in that it took a year to get everybody to our new home. Our oldest son Wes was in Florida at the time doing a ministry internship. When the move was first mentioned, he was cool about the whole thing. He quickly said, “After all I’m a college student. I have left home.” About a month after the move we got a six-page letter that told a different story. We had moved to a place he had never seen. His room would no longer be waiting when he returned. You would have thought he had been completely orphaned. He had lost his place to be. We need a place to be.

A little over a year ago, we started a building and renovation program in this Church. In less than three months now, we will move into a wonderful new facility for adults and youth. In the meantime many of you have been temporarily displaced in order to complete the children’s wing renovation, which will house a greatly expanded Day School and brand new Day Care Center. We will even move to Crockett Park for worship on August 8 as this sanctuary is scheduled to be painted and re-carpeted.

First I want to thank the Building Committee chaired by Gary Carden and the Trustees chaired by Phil Wenk. You are leading us well. And I want to especially

thank Mary Ann Haney and Rob Huckaby from our staff who are guiding this process along. To all of us who have been asked to move over, double up, change, adapt, adjust, I say hang on. This too shall pass. In the meantime remember we are a family— a family of God. Let's be the best family we can be.

WE EAT AT THE SAME TABLE

I Corinthians 10:17 *Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of one loaf.* Maybe we are never more family than when we gather at holy communion

Will Willimon in his book Sunday Dinner says some of my fondest memories are Sunday Dinner at my Grandfather's big rambling house where we all gathered after church. Family meant more than mother, father, sisters and brothers. Family included an army of cousins, aunts, uncles, and a host of passersby whose relationship to the clan was less clear. Because of this Sunday mealtime ritual, no one had to tell me what it meant to be part of the family. No one had to explain to me that I belonged or that I was loved. I never needed formal instruction in orthodox belief or behavior. I learned all that at my Grandmother's dinner table. At the table we were initiated, nurtured, and claimed into the family. There we participated in common memory, fellowship and identity. There at the table we found our place, our name, our story.

The Church gathers at the table. We call it the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, the Great Thanksgiving, the Holy Eucharist. By whatever name it is the Church's family meal. In our tradition, all are welcome. As Charles Wesley said, "Come sinners to the gospel feast, let every soul be Jesus' guest."

1. Here we receive and share grace.
2. Here we find and extend forgiveness.
3. Here we are blessed to be a blessing.
4. Here though diverse, we are united.
5. One bread, one body, one Lord of all,
One cup of blessing which we bless,
And we though many, throughout the earth,
We are one body in this one Lord.

WE PURSUE THE SAME PURPOSE

Jesus— *"For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, is my brother and sister and mother.* Matthew 12:50

There is a will of God. There's no secret to it.

1. It is the will of God that not one little one should perish.
2. It is the will of God that justice roll down like rivers and righteousness as a mighty stream.
3. It is the will of God that we love one another, even our enemies.
4. It is the will of God that the poor be served, the widows not forgotten

and the imprisoned not forsaken.

5. It is the will of God that all should come to know the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

6. It is the will of God that we no longer be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine but that we grow up in every way into Christ who is the head of the church.

7. It is the will of God that greed give way to good and that there be an equal sharing of the resources of earth.

8. What part of God's will don't you understand?
Wasn't Dante right? — In God's will is our peace.

There is a will of God. And Jesus says on this day when his mother and brothers and sisters come to get him to say go on back home and be quiet, Jesus says to those around him, "Wait a minute. Who are my kinfolk? Who really is my kin? *Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.*

The kinship ties of those who pursue the will of God are stronger than those of race and clan.

In Christ there is no east nor west,
In him no north or south
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.

I know that right is right,
that givers shall increase,
That duty lights the way
for the beautiful feet of peace,
That courage is better than fear,
and faith is truer than doubt.
And fierce though the fiends may fight,
and long though the angels hide
I know that truth and right
Have the universe on their side.
And that somewhere beyond the stars,
Is a love that is stronger than hate
And when the night unlocks her bars,
I shall see him—And I will wait.

So if your heart is with my heart in love and loyalty to Jesus Christ, take my hand.
Welcome to the family, the family of God.

Amen.

