

June 7 B 2015 The Family of God

Last Sunday, I was at a Memorial Service in South St. Paul for Uncle Bruce.

I'm glad I went. It was important to be there.

I saw family members from RitaRae's side of the family that I haven't seen in many years.

They recognized me...some talked with me.

Even though I personally am not emotionally close with most of them, or geographically for that matter, we're still family.

It was important to be there.

The poet Robert Frost summed up family with these famous words:

"Home is the place where when you have to go there they have to take you in"
("The Death of the Hired Man").

Family you are stuck with.

We are in family season.

Aware of it or not, we are in the time between Mother's Day and Father's Day...

Superseded on the Iron Range by the fishing opener and Land of the Loon.

We are in family season.

It is graduation time.

Graduations have been happening all over the Iron Range...parties also.

We celebrate the success of our young people...and their hopes for the future.

We are in marching band season...we make our way to the various parades to cheer them on.

I've been really looking forward to this summer.

It is a summer of family time for me.

This month, Noah and his family are coming to visit.

We don't see them as much as we would like.

In July, my brother John and sister-in-law Joni are visiting.

This is only the second time in ten years that they have come to visit.

But I'm so thankful.

In August, my sister and I are going out to Ohio to visit my aunt and uncle.

I look forward to the adventure...and the family time.

Here's the thing about families...they are so far from perfect.
No rose-colored glasses can gloss over the problems we have right within our own families.

Which of our families does not have someone who suffers from...
Alcohol, drug addiction, gender issues, convictions, mental illness, self-absorbed people, broken relationships where people refuse to even talk with each other, abusive situations, major health issues, dementia...and the list is really endless.

So families are a source of great joy and great pain.
They are the very people through whom God's goodness is made known to us...
and the very people who reveal to us how broken we really are.
Families teach us about love, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, and relationship.
And families teach us about hate, judgment, self-centeredness, and loneliness.

I've learned something else about family.
God enlarges family beyond bloodlines.
I'm talking about more than in-laws...and out-laws.
I'm talking about friends and relationships who become your family.
God gives us people who function—in effect—as our families...
people through whom we come to know the life God intends for us...
people who play crucial roles in our journeys of life.

Somehow God raises up people for us with whom we connect.
We form relationships of respect, affection, and the sharing of joys and sorrows.
I'm talking about people who seem to get you, you know.
They appreciate how you are put together.
They look past your faults and can genuinely celebrate what makes you special.
They affirm...they challenge...they care.

Isn't it interesting with whom you connect?
Sometimes it's because you are similar in age, and have common experiences.
Sometimes it has to do with education, or common interests.
Sometimes you are close because you have gone through some difficult stuff together.
Or perhaps you just had the privilege of spending time together.
At any rate, God has put different people into your life.
And they are family for you...they are God's blessing for you.

Our Gospel story today tells us about the family of Jesus...and something more. Jesus had parents, Mary and Joseph.

His four brothers are named in Matthew, chapter 13: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas.

Jesus was the first-born.

Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus had sisters, but they are not named in the Bible.

At around the age of 30, Jesus left his hometown of Nazareth...to preach and teach...to heal...to release people from their demons...to bring about the kingdom of God.

Right from the get-go, he faced opposition.

In particular, religious leaders rejected what he had to say about God.

Some called him crazy.

Some called him Satan.

In verses 23-27, Jesus taught in a parable that he could not be Satan... because God had defeated Satan through him.

The crowds that flocked around Jesus also contributed to the problem, because they increased the tensions with the leaders.

Long and short, Jesus butted heads with the religious leaders throughout the gospels...and you know where that's going to take us in the end. The cross.

Through all this opposition, when Jesus returned from his travels to his hometown of Nazareth, you can imagine the stress this put on the family.

After all, they were Jewish people, and their own leaders were publicly condemning him and denouncing him.

And some of their neighbors, their family clan, treated Jesus like a rock star.

What a mess this caused the family.

So they did what they thought they needed to do.

They tried to quiet him.

Vs. 21 says: *They went out to restrain him.* Not what you want from your family.

That's when Jesus taught what family is all about.

The crowd that gathered around him said, *Hey, Jesus. Your family is outside, asking for you.*

Jesus told the crowd, *Who are my mother and brothers? You are.*

Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.

You see, from a spiritual perspective, family doesn't have to do with bloodlines. Family includes anyone who hears the call of God in Jesus, and seeks to live accordingly.

That's who Jesus' family is.

Faith isn't based on your sir name.

Faith is based on following Jesus...on journeying with Jesus...on living based on the values and truths of Jesus.

Relationships in this family are couched in terms of "doing the will of God."

That's what makes you family with Jesus.

That's what makes us brothers and sisters in Christ.

That's what makes us fathers and mothers and children of God.

We are family.

That means respect and affection and the sharing of joys and sorrows.

That means recognizing how each person is special and gifted.

That means being supportive, nurturing, and caring for one another.

Doing the will of God together.

What exactly does that mean, in terms of specific behaviors?

Well, our gospel reading today does not really tell us.

At this point in the gospel story of Jesus, just what that "doing the will of God" actually means is not specifically detailed.

For those of us who thrive on lists, who need "things to do" to establish some comfort level, this story of Jesus will not comply with your wishes.

Instead, we will have to be willing to come along for the journey.

We will have to depend on the lessons of faith and life that we have learned over a long period of time.

We will just have to trust this Jesus...and the invitation to join him and walk in his ways...

and to believe that in his company, we will participate in the unfolding of the good news of God's kingdom among us and in our world.

Peace to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ.