

Matthew 10: 24-39
Creekside COB
June 22, 2008

“Is Jesus *Family Friendly*?”

Is Jesus family friendly? You probably think it's a silly question. Of course Jesus is family friendly.” He told us how to strengthen the bonds of the family. “The family that prays together stays together,” right? Jesus didn't say that, but it sounds like something he could have said.

This being an election year we can count on the candidates trying to “*out-family*” each other. But politicians rarely spell out what they mean by *family values*. It is as if simply invoking of the words creates understanding. Family values will be discussed and debated, and each one will blame the party of the other for contributing to the erosion of the American family.

Many reasons are given for family stress -- divorce, single-mother homes, dead-beat dads, abuse of every sort, promiscuous parenting, no discipline or setting limits, drugs and alcohol, same-sex unions, television, the Internet, over-programmed, over-stimulated children. We need guidance to make families strong, loving, and nurturing for life.

Jesus is for the family. He condemned adultery. “Commit it in the heart and it's the same as having committed it in practice.” He hated divorce because it was such an easy thing for a man to get in those days. The man went his way, and the woman was left destitute to fend for herself. Jesus told couples to honor their covenants. He took the Hebrew scripture's emphasis upon marriage as the norm.

Jesus is for the family. When cracks form in the family foundation, we can look to Jesus for guidance -- *MAYBE*. Jesus wouldn't be a good “pro-family” candidate because he said troubling things about family.

In our text from Matthew, Jesus is teaching “Discipleship 101.” In the course of drilling the disciples on the do’s and don’ts of spreading the good news he said:

“Don’t think I’ve come to make life cozy. I’ve come to cut -- make a sharp knife-cut between son and father, daughter and mother, bride and mother-in-law -- cut through these cozy domestic arrangements and free you for God. Well-meaning family members can be your worst enemies. If you prefer father or mother over me, you don’t deserve me. If you prefer son or daughter over me, you don’t deserve me.”

Depending on their status in life, people who heard Jesus tasted either sour or sweet. If you were from a well-fed, well-off family, you puckered. If you had no family or had been rejected by your family, how sweet to know that blood isn’t thicker than the bond of belonging to Jesus and his family. No matter what happened, Jesus’ family took you in.

Did you ever wonder about the disciples’ families? We don’t know if all the disciples were married. How did the wives react when their husbands dropped everything to follow Jesus? “Sorry honey. Don’t have time to explain. I’m not sure I could do it if I did. It’s a tough choice, but I’m leaving you for Jesus.”

Zebede, and his sons, James and John, ran a fishing business that had been in the family for generations. What was Zeb’s reaction when his boys said, “We’ve decided to go fishing with Jesus. Good luck, Pop!”

A would-be disciple told Jesus he would gladly follow him, but his father just died. “I must first make funeral arrangements. After visitation and the grave-side service for dear old Dad, I’ll be ready to go.” Jesus replied, “Let the dead bury the dead,” and went his way without him.

Consider how Jesus related to his own family. When he was twelve he came up missing during a pilgrimage from Jerusalem.

Joseph and Mary were beside themselves. They frantically scoured the streets of Jerusalem, and finally found him at the Temple, discussing theology with the scholars. “Young man, your father and I have been worried sick over you! What do you have to say for yourself?” He replied, “*You should have known that I would be about my Father’s business.*”

Imagine your 16 year-old son walks in the front door at 3:00 a.m., three hours past curfew. Knowing you have waiting up, he says, “Hi, Mom,” like its no big deal. You say, “You better have a good excuse.” He answers, “*I was out and about doing God’s business.*”

Jesus preached to a large crowd. His mother and brothers were there and wanted to talk to him. Someone relayed the message. “Lord, your mother and your brothers are here to see you.” “Who’s my mother? Who are my brothers? My followers are my family, now. Whoever does the work of my Father is my mother and brothers.” (Matthew 12:46-50)

At the wedding in Cana, Mary told Jesus, “The reception is in trouble. They’re almost out of wine.” Jesus said to his mother, “Woman, what do you have to do with me?” Is that any way to treat your mother? It makes you wonder how family friendly Jesus actually is.

It was hard finding cover art for today’s bulletin. Nearly all the pictures in the family file showed a smiling white family with two kids (always a boy and girl). They were either enjoying a picnic, praying around the dinner table, or eagerly walking up the steps to the church -- Norman Rockwell portraits of the American Christian family.” Jesus, however, did not paint that kind of portrait.

So where do we look for models of what sound, strong families should be? You are probably thinking, “There’s another dumb question. We look to the Bible. You’re right, but what family will you choose? What about the first family -- Adam, Eve, Cain, and Able? Adam and Eve spat over who was at fault for getting

thrown out of the Garden of Eden. Cain was jealous of brother Able, so he killed him. No, you don't want them.

How about Abraham? God made good on the promise of descendants. He had children by Sarah and a slave woman named Hagar. They bickered over which of their sons, Isaac or Ishmael would be the family heir. Not a pretty picture. You don't want them.

Isaac and Rebecca had twins, Jacob and Esau. Jacob was Rebecca's favorite, and Isaac favored Esau, the first-born. When Isaac was old and blind, Rebecca and Jacob devised a plan to disguise Jacob as Esau in order to steal the blessing that rightfully belonged to his dull, unsuspecting brother. There's not time to mention Jacob's other deceitful acts. Let's just say this family isn't a good model, either.

What about God's beloved, David -- Israel's greatest king? David spied Bathsheba bathing and the two had an affair. David arranged for her husband, Urriah, to be killed in a battle, and then added Bathsheba to his concubine. No -- definitely not them.

But that was the Old Testament, you say. It was different in the New Testament. Well, do you want the Holy Family as your model? Think of the road they traveled. There are huge gaps in their story we know nothing about. Joseph disappears. Was Jesus raised by a single mother? He was born in a stable and died on a cross, and a prophesied sword pierced Mary's soul. We'll pass on their family life. In Acts, two married couples are mentioned. One was Ananais and Sapphira. They are remembered for skimming off money for themselves that should have gone to the church and then lying about it. When confronted by Peter about what they had done, they both dropped dead with heart attacks. There's a theme for our next stewardship campaign! Who wants to model their marriage after these two? Which Bible family best models good family values?

There are individuals and families for whom Sunday worship is a lonely experience. Their families are a mess and they don't want

others to know. They see other families in the church who seem so close and glad to be together. It seems that every family but their own has it “together,” which makes them more isolated and hopeless.

How many perfect families are here today? Don't be humble. Let's see a show of hands of families with no conflict and where seldom is heard a discouraging word. Whose family hasn't experienced jealousy dissension, brokenness, divorce, stone-cold silence around the dinner table, or doors slammed shut in anger? Just as I thought. We have no perfect families in this church -- or any church. There are no model families in the Bible. That's encouraging! You can trust the Bible to tell the truth because it does not disguise human frailty. There is a reason that stories of dysfunctional families were not left out. If families were capable of making it alone and mending themselves, God wouldn't be necessary. There would be no longing to belong to a better family.

Jesus offers an alternative to family as we have experienced it. Some of you were blessed to grow up in families that were stable, loving, and secure. Some of you have scars from wounds you received in your family. Good or bad, our notions of family are shaped by what we experienced. The family Jesus fashioned has no boundaries. Everyone can belong. No one is excluded.

Will Willimon was the Dean of the Duke University Chapel. He said he rarely got calls from parents who were concerned about their children's binge drinking or “lifestyle” issues. The most hostile calls were from parents who paid big money for their kids to become lawyers, doctors, and high profile, highly paid professionals. “We hold you personally responsible for ruining our son's future! Billy was just fine until he started attending church and listening to you. Thanks to you he's gone overboard with Christianity and won't be going to the Harvard Law School where his mother and I dreamed he would go, but is going to live on a dirt poor Indian reservation teaching children to read, instead.” Moms and Dads were livid because their children exchanged the family's values for strange values like service,

sacrifice, and generosity toward those who are least in the world.

"Don't think I've come to make life cozy. I've come to make a sharp knife-cut between son and father, daughter and mother, to cut through these cozy domestic arrangements and free you for God. Well-meaning family members can be your worst enemies. (Matthew 10:34-35)

Jesus can be divisive. In some countries becoming a Christian costs you your family. You are rejected, and in some cases, killed. While a decision for Jesus probably won't cost us our lives, it can cost us relationships with family and friends threatened by the different values you have embraced.

I've heard you say it many times, "I'm closer to my church family than the family I come from." The church gives fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers to those who need them. What a friend we have in Jesus who adopts into a family much bigger than those named Bibbee, Barwick, and even bigger than Smith. How good it is to say, "I'm in Jesus' family now."