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CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

Weekly Sermon

Easter 7 • John 17:6-19 One Big Happy Family

Four words which do not often go together: one - big - happy and family. You put family members together - add a moderate amount of stress... ythrow in a few adult beverages... and wait for the dysfunction to break forth. Families may well love each other... families may also be a source of support and nurture - but families have raised fighting and angst and unhappiness to an art-form. This is not simply a contemporary phenomenon. Let's take a quick biblical tour - we'll look at some biblical models of "family"...

First family: Adam and Eve... disobey God - good bye paradise. Cain and Abel cannot get along... just two of them. Cain kills Abel and runs becoming the first kid to have his picture on a milk carton.

Noah's family: Noah saved his family from the flood and then got naked and plastered. He didn't appreciate the fact that one of his boys (Ham) mocked him for his naked drunk condition. So Noah cursed his son. There is no record that Ham attended Thanksgiving dinner with the family that year.

Abraham's family: God promised a child to an elderly couple (Abram and Sarah). Abram was not ready to wait on Sarah to get pregnant so he had sex with his maid, Hagar. (With the name "Hagar" she must have been a real cutie.) Hagar got pregnant, had a son (Ishmael) and then made fun of Sarah for not being able to get pregnant. Hagar and Ishmael left because they were no longer welcome in that happy family.

Lot's family: this brainiac tried to give his daughters over to a bunch of hooligans.

Isaac's family: Jacob (one of Isaac's twin boys) swindled Esau (the other twin) out of his birthright by lying to dad with the help of his mother Rebecca. Esau—understandably—then wanted to kill his brother, Jacob. So Jacob ran away to live with his crazy Uncle Laban, who tricked him into marrying his less-than-gorgeous daughter, Leah. Then as a good will gesture, Laban threw in his attractive daughter, Rachael, to smooth things over.

Jacob's family: Jacob had 12 boys and decided to buy the youngest one, Joseph, a designer coat. That didn't sit well with the other brothers. So instead of leaving him out of family football they decided to throw him into a hole and kill him. The older brother, Reuben, was more reasonable and talked them into merely selling him as a slave to a band of Egyptian thugs. They told dad an animal killed him. Nice.

King Saul's family: Israel's first king (Saul) was jealous of the popularity of a shepherd boy (David) and became obsessed with killing him. Saul's son Jonathon protected his best friend David, choosing his friend over his dad. Dad and son became estranged. That was not a display of family unity.

King David's family: king David had a fling with his next-door neighbor, got her pregnant and killed her husband to cover it up. The baby died. Then one of his sons (Absalom) betrayed him.

The Holy Family: Jesus' parents (Mary and Joseph) left their son (Jesus) behind on a road trip to Jerusalem.

They somehow missed the fact that the son of God was no longer with them on the way home. They turned around and went back for him. They found him in the temple and made him get back in the wagon. Bonus...

Paul's family: actually, Paul the apostle never got married or had a family. That's right. The original church planter and primary author of the new testament opted out of the whole family thing. Maybe he read an article similar to this one around 40 ad.

(Thank you Kidz Blitz ministries)

The point isn't to denigrate the family, but to recognize that families are not always a Norman Rockwell painting. Doesn't make them bad... it simply is reality. The church is no different. A prayer for unity... even a prayer from our Lord – does not bring about organic, systemic, monolithic conformity. People, even people within the church, fuss and fight.

Doesn't mean that we stop being family... but it does mean that sometimes our behaviors are less than admirable. We may well be united in our baptism into Jesus Christ... and worship in different formats and places with differing polity and organization. Does not mean that we stop being family... it simply means that when we are together for Thanksgiving and Christmas... we don't talk about politics with our Uncle.

Our unity is not based on nor displayed by our organic sameness. We do not all belong to one over-arching church. We do not all worship the same way. Same God... differing expressions of what it means to be a baptized follower of Jesus Christ. Is there room for all within the family? I think so.

Because what unites us is far greater than what divides us. Through baptism, we are placed into the body of Christ. It is not our agreement, but God's action which brings this about. Unity in Christ is not the product of a vote of those placed into relationship and it is not dissolved by a vote of the governed. Christ does not rule by consent of the governed... Christ rules because he is the son of God. We are placed into relationship... and sometimes that relation becomes fractured and broken.

When this is the case... we focus on the ultimate unity - a common baptism... pray for organic unity... and join together to provide ministry to a world which also knows brokenness and pain. John 17:18 is our mandate to act: "as you have sent me into the world,

So I have sent them into the world."

May we find unity of purpose - unity of mission and ministry... and continue to work toward organic unity. Until that day arrives... we celebrate our common baptism into Jesus Christ... a baptism which embodies the words of Christ in 17:11 - "...Protect them in your name

That you have given me,
So that they may be one,
As we are one."

Amen