

**June 6, 2021
Christ the Servant, Reston
Pentecost 2
Mark 3:20-25**

Jesus was just not a family values kind of guy. I'm sorry. I know that the term, family values, is in vogue. It's big. But Jesus was just not a family values kind of guy. If he were a family values kind of guy we would not have that story about him as an adolescent where he simply disappears from mom and dad without saying where he is going. And, when he is found, is very curt and abrupt with frantic Mary and Joseph saying only, "Don't you know I must be in my father's house." If Jesus were a family values kind of guy he wouldn't have counseled James and John to leave their elderly father sitting there in a beached boat to come follow him. If Jesus were a family values kind of guy he wouldn't have said, "I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother." He wouldn't have said, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters ... can't be my disciple." Did you ever hear that preached on Mother's Day? I think not!

If Jesus were a family values kind of guy we wouldn't have the account we heard today from the third chapter of Mark in which things are heating up for Jesus. He has been healing and casting out evil spirits – and doing so in such a frenzy that people are beginning to accuse Jesus, himself, of being possessed or, at the least, just plain crazy. His own family becomes concerned about his well-being. His mother and brothers and sisters (yes, Mark says he has brothers and sisters) – show up asking for him. We presume they want to help protect him in some way.

Someone in the crowd says to Jesus, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside asking for you.” A family values guy would have had them come in. But Jesus does not do this. He says starkly, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Then, looking at those who are sitting around him he says, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Now, before you write a letter to Bishop Ortiz telling her that Pastor Carl preached a sermon against family values, let me reassure you that: Yes, Jesus was for marriage. Yes, Jesus valued and loved children. Yes, Jesus showed love and affection for his own mother as he hung on the cross. Yes, whatever it is that you and I value about family I imagine Jesus would value as well.

However, he is saying that the family of biology is not of ultimate importance. The family of God is! And who is God’s family? “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother,” Jesus says. Here Jesus is challenging us to expand our perception about who we are related to. Those who do God’s will are brothers and sisters in Christ. Brothers and sisters have a responsibility to one another.

Sometimes biological family can even *prevent* us from remembering that we are a part of the family of God. I think of one community in which I served where one’s importance in the town related directly to which family that person came from. The older families were ranked highest. If you had lived in the community for twenty-five years you were still a newcomer.

One day, in church, the oldest couple in the congregation who came from the longest standing family in the community walked in to find a troop of boy scouts sitting in “their” pew. They turned around, walked out in a huff, and didn’t come back for weeks. Later, when the wife passed

away, I found their family plot at the cemetery to be a circle of grave stones all facing inward How sad, I thought. Biological family can get in the way of the family of God – their church community and the village in which they lived.

Paul Tillich once wrote a very interesting article on this passage in which he asserted that our natural inclinations to do acts of love and justice in the world may be inhibited by the psychological image of a stern parent who warned you, when you were little, not to have anything to do with strangers and to be suspicious of people who were not like you.

Jesus challenges us to think of family in a different way. Families are not those cartoon decals you see on the back windows of SUV's with a mom, dad, one girl, one boy, and one dog – maybe even a cat. Single people are part of our family. Single parents are part of our family. Divorced people are part of our family. Gay parents with kids are not only family, but part of *our* family. Jesus said, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” When we are a part of God's family that means that other members of God's family are, by nature, our brothers and sisters. The next time we hear the term “family values” let's think of it *that* way.

Rugged individualism is not a family value. Rugged individualism says, “I can do this all by myself and I don't need you. Furthermore, you can do it all by yourself and please don't need me. I am not responsibility for you.” Sorry, we need each other. We are human beings. No one of us can do all things. Some things we do well, but we count on others to help with the things we cannot do. Some people have needs other people can meet. It is true of your biological family. It is true of the world in which we live.

There are many symbols in baptism – water, a shell, a candle, maybe some oil. But I wonder if you ever thought of the pastor talking the child from the parents’ arms as a metaphor. When a child is baptized, he or she stops being a member of one biological family and instantly becomes a member of a larger family – a congregation, a denomination, a world-wide communion of Christians who do the will of God. The pastor literally *takes* the child from his parents. Now that child is to be loved, cared for, and nurtured by the community of Christ. You and I are *responsible* for those who come to our font. When they do well we need to praise them. Then they mess up we need to help them, not criticize. When we don’t see them in church we need to ask after them. *That’s* family values.

I mentioned that Paul Tillich once said that we can be inhibited from doing God’s will because of the psychological image of a stern parent. He said that works that way when we think of God as a stern parent, too. Our fear of God may actually prevent us from reaching out to those who may be different than we are. But the thing that changed all this, Tillich says, is that – with God – the father becomes the child! God, the Father, became incarnate through his son, Jesus. The father became the child.

It does not work that way in biological families. But it works that way in *God’s* family. And, because God became our own brother in Christ, we can all be – and we can all *behave as* – brothers and sisters in God’s awesome, colorful, diverse family.