

Sermon Notes – August 2, 2020**“Welcome to the Family”****(Mark 3:20-21, 31-35)**

I want to talk a little bit this morning about family – the family of God. But, let me give you a little background before we get to this particular passage in Mark’s gospel. In Mark’s gospel, it said Jesus’ family was upset with him. Now keep in mind that Jesus had already been to his hometown of Nazareth and they had run Jesus out of town. Jesus went to the synagogue and proclaimed that the spirit of God was upon him. God wanted him to proclaim good news, heal the sick, and tell others about his kingdom. He said, “This day this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” They looked at Jesus like, “Are you crazy? Aren’t you Joseph’s son? Aren’t you that carpenter’s son? Aren’t you related to Mary and all those brothers and sisters that come to the synagogue? Who do you think you are coming in here telling us that you’re the son of God?” So, they ran him out of town. Jesus left Nazareth – he got away before they scooted him off a cliff.

He left town and he went on to preach and teach and heal. Jesus set up a home base in Capernaum. He was probably in the town of Capernaum when he went into this house in our gospel lesson today. He was preaching and teaching and healing people again. That house was so crowded that nobody could get in from the outside. His mother and his brothers came and they wanted to take Jesus home. They had been hearing that Jesus had been saying things upsetting the scribes and the Pharisees. He’s gone against the conventional wisdom of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. They think he must be crazy. “He must’ve crossed the line between genius and insanity. Who does he think he is proclaiming himself as the son of God? Well, maybe he’s overworked – maybe he’s tired – maybe he hasn’t eaten yet – maybe he’s about to have a breakdown. We need to take him home. Maybe if we take him home, he’ll get married, have children, go back into the carpentry shop, take care of us (his mom, his brothers, his younger siblings). We just need to take him home.” But, there was somebody else upset with him – all those Pharisees. Jesus had two groups trying to squash his ministry – his own biological family and the Pharisees who were the religious leaders of that

day. We don't know from that scripture passage, but did he ever go out and speak to his family? I tend to think that Jesus was not dissing his family or disrespecting them. I think he probably, afterwards, went out and brought them in or went out and spoke to them. **But, what I want you to notice (and Mark wants you to notice in the gospel lesson) is that Jesus had a bigger point to make that day... and that is - who is the family of God?**

Jesus said, "You have a family beyond your nuclear unit - your base unit - your biological family. You have the family of God." *The family of God are all those who have professed faith in him and choose to do God's will.* Luke's gospel, about this same passage, says that my mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice. What does God ask us to do? He said the greatest commandments are to love God and love one another. What did Micah say? - "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with one another?" God told us what he wants from us. He said any who believe and choose to live for him are part of the family of God. You are part of an extended family. Now keep in mind, the only family they understood in that day was like us - our nuclear family - our biological family - our birth parents - our grandparents, uncles, aunts - all those to whom we are related. Jesus said, "**I've come to tell you that you have a new family - an extended family - your spiritual family - the family of God.**" What's so special about that? Well, we're part of a large family in the body of Christ - not only here, but all around the world. Jesus was always extending boundaries. He included male and female, young and old, rich and poor - no matter what your educational level - no matter who you were or where you came from. We're family because of our faith in Jesus Christ - not because of DNA, bloodlines, etc. As long as they believed in him and wanted to live for him, they were part of the family of God.

What makes us unique as a spiritual family? I want to share with you four things: 1) We have a common parent, 2) we celebrate and share a common meal (the Lord's Supper), 3) we share in the same household - we are part of the body of Christ, 4) we have a common purpose - a

shared purpose.

First, we have a common parent – God, the Father. God created us and he created us with a will - He chose us - He claimed us - He created us - He knows us better than anyone - He loves us most. In the Psalms, David said, “God knew you before you were knit in your mother’s womb. God said you are wonderfully made.” He’s claimed you and created you - but, He created you with a free will to choose to be a part of his family. That’s our choice. God has already claimed us - He is already seeking us out.

I heard a story about a young girl named Tammy Harris in Roanoke, Virginia. She was 21-years-old and when she finished high school, she went to work for a convenience store. She had been adopted as a baby. But, at age 21, she wanted to know who her birth mother was and why she gave her up for adoption. For two-years she searched and looked for her birth mother to no avail. One day, she’s in the convenience store and she’s sharing with one of her co-workers that she was frustrated and discouraged that she couldn’t find out who her birth mother was. Another lady (Joyce Shultz) in the store heard her talking and went up to them. She said, “You know, when I was 16-years old, I had a child and my boyfriend wanted nothing to do with it and left me. I figured that child would be better off if I gave it up for adoption - to be adopted by a family that would love and provide financially for it - since I had no means to do so. I want you to know that a year after I did that, I started looking for that child - and for the last 20-years, I have been searching for my birth child.” What she didn’t know was that mother and daughter worked in the same store... All of a sudden, Tammy told her what her birth date was - when she was born and what town she was born in - who adopted her - and all this stuff. The mother said, “I used to live in that area. I grew up there... in fact, that’s where I had my baby and I gave it up for adoption. When did you say you were born?” Come to find out, the mother and the daughter had been working together and became friends for the past few years from working at that convenience store. They fell into each others’ arms and embraced each other - as family. The mother said, “I’m not trying to take your adopted mother’s place, but I just hope we can have some kind of friendship or relationship.” And

they did. She searched for 20-years for her daughter. Do you know that God continues to search and seek us - and wants to claim us? He's already claimed us - he just wants us to choose to be part of his family. We have a common parent who knows us best and loves us most.

Secondly, we also share the same household. The Apostle Paul said, "We are many, but we are one." We all belong to the same body - we are fellow citizens in God's household - we are members of his household. We may be diverse - we have lots of talents and abilities - but, we all belong to the one body of Christ. You know, somebody once said, "that families create the greatest potential for love, but also the greatest possibility for conflict." Would you agree to that? Families can mean so much to us when they come to us in our time of need or crisis. It's a blessing and a joy to have them there for us. Have you ever noticed that sometimes the person that can hurt you most (the deepest) is a member of the family? We also have that potential in the church. We are a diverse group - we come with different skills and abilities - from different backgrounds - we're rich and poor, young and old - conservative and liberal - Republican and Democrat. We are so different. We have the greatest potential for love, but we also have the greatest possibility of conflict. Jesus said we are to love one another. "By this, all of the world will know you are my disciples - if you have love for one another."

I heard an interesting story about a single mother who was raising three boys by herself. They used to fight, fuss, and argue always about something - and they'd come running in the house saying, "Mom! You need to straighten him out! He lied about me!" "Mom, he stole my ball." "Mom, he did so-and-so." She'd look at those boys and say, "You boys need to get outside and resolve this and remember your bond as brothers." *I wonder if that isn't what Jesus wants to say to us in the church? **We are diverse and different, but remember your bond as brothers and sisters in the family of God.*** We may not always like each other - or agree with each other - but we are to do the right thing and love and care for one another. We belong to the household of God.

Thirdly, we also partake of a common meal – the Lord’s Supper. On the night that Jesus was to be betrayed, he took a meal with his disciples and he blessed the bread and the cup. “This is my body... this is my blood given for you. Every time you do this, do it in remembrance of me.” He gave it to them - in common - in order for them to remember their connection to God - to celebrate God’s presence and love for them. They had a sense of belonging. They were connected to God, to one another, and to all people around the world who celebrate this meal - a meal that we celebrate in common.

Book author, Dr. Will Willimon (a retired Methodist Minister who used to be a Chaplain Minister at Duke University Chapel in Durham), wrote a book called “Sunday Dinner.” Any of you remember when lunch used to be called dinner? When I grew up on the farm, Sunday lunch was “dinner.” He grew up like that. In his book, he told that on Sunday after church, his family would go to lunch at the home of his grandfather and grandmother. He said they had this big 2-story white house in the country - and grandmother cooked Saturday night and all Sunday morning (before and after church) - and they had this big huge spread on the table. There was always lots of food and lots of desserts. It wasn’t just for myself, or my mom and dad, or my brothers and sisters, but for everybody - aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. Even if a stranger came up to the house, they would invite them in to eat with them. Everybody was invited. He said, “I never doubted at that Sunday dinner that I belonged, that I was loved, and that I would be fed.”

When you and I come to the Lord’s Table, we come knowing that we are loved by God. We belong. We are part of the family of God and we will be fed and strengthened to live for him.

There is a fourth thing that I want to share about our spiritual family -- we have a common purpose. Jesus, in Matthew and Mark’s gospels, says, “My mother and brothers and sisters are those who do God’s will.” In Luke’s gospel, the reading is a little bit different. It says, “My mother and brothers and sisters are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.” We have a common purpose. Jesus said the greatest

commandment was to love God with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus often told us to not forget to feed and care for the widowed and the hungry – the needy and the poor. Micah says we are to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Put into practice what Jesus lived and taught and what the scriptures said. *Being a part of the family of God, we have a common parent, we have a common table, we have a common purpose.* We all belong to the family of God. We're different. We're going to agree and disagree some... but, we're all a part of God's family. When you come to the Lord's table, may you be reminded that you belong and you are loved – you will be fed so you can go out and help those in the world. Jesus said, *"I came to give you an extended definition of family. You have a larger family – your spiritual family – the family of God."*

What is family to you? What is your spiritual family like? **What is the family of God like at this church? I want to share a few things with you guys to remind you that we're family.** During this pandemic of the coronavirus, many of you have sent cards, called people, or connected by Facebook/Twitter/Snapchat or in some way kept contact with each other. Some of you have donated food, taken it to people's homes and left it on the doorstep. Some of you have dropped off paper supplies. Some of you have dropped off cans of food for ECCCM for the hungry in this area. There are people in this church that if I asked you if there was somebody here who walked alongside you in a crisis, you would say, "Yes. Somebody I knew was praying for me. They care for me. They helped me out." Our church is to pray together - fellowship together. It is to partake of the Lord's meal – to share our time, talents, and resources. We are the family of God. We belong to a much larger family.

I would like to make another statement about family: *Sometimes your family in Christ will be stronger than the ties you have with your biological family.* Some of us may be a family of one – some are a family of 25 or 10 or 5 or 15 – but we all have a larger family, our family of God. We're here to encourage and support one another – to pray together, to worship together, to take the Lord's supper together – share fellowship meals – encourage one another in our faith walk with Christ – and be there in

crisis for one another.

I want to share a story with you, one that I have shared before – but it’s one that Rick Warren taught – who is Pastor at Saddleback Church in California. Rick said there was a couple in his church that were expecting a child. It came time for that child to be born and it was stillborn. The husband got on the phone and called Pastor Rick. He said, “Rick, we need your prayers. We really need your prayers. We are having a difficult time with this loss.” When he got off the phone, Pastor Rick called the couples’ Sunday School teacher. That afternoon, there were 8 or 10 of those couples that showed up at the hospital in the waiting room. They called the husband out into the waiting room and that whole group of couples surrounded him and asked if it was okay if they pray with him. The Sunday School teacher led them in prayer and they gave him a big hug. Two of the couples said, “We’ve been through this. We want to walk through this with you and we’ll be there for you.” The husband and the Sunday School teacher went into where his wife was and had prayer with her. The husband said, “There is a group out there that is praying for us. They said they’d be there for us and walk with us through this. Thank you for being here.” That’s part of being the family of God.

I want to welcome you to the family of God. The larger family of God – not just here – but in the North and South and East and West. J.J. Packer once said, “You want to know how well people understand Christianity? Ask them what they think about being a child of God and having God as their father. If that doesn’t affect the way they worship, pray, and their outcome of life, maybe they don’t understand Christianity.” May we go from here knowing we belong to a bigger family – the family of God – we have a common parent (God the Father); we share in the same household – the body of Christ; we partake of a common meal – the Lord’s Supper, and we have a common purpose – to love God supremely and to love one another.

May we go live as the family of God in our world. Amen.