### “From Whom Every Family” Steve Finlan for The First Church, July 28, 2024

**Ephesians 3:14–19**

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 16I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, 17and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 18I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

**John 6:5–15**

5When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” . . . 8Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, 9 “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” 10Jesus said, “Make the people sit down. . .” They sat down, about five thousand in all. 11Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments. . . ” 13So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.” 15 When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Welcome, everyone, to First Church. Summer is here: usually a time when we get to spend more time with our families. Today’s sermon delivers a message about families, including our place in the family of God.

I chose my title from a line in Ephesians, that “every family in heaven and on earth takes its name” from the Father (Eph 3:15). We are fathers and mothers because God is the first father or mother. We are named after him. It’s not just a metaphor, it’s a real pattern. God has created the pattern and we follow the example. One way God shares his love of us is *through* our families. The author of Ephesians imparts this knowledge about families, and he wants us to rejoice in this knowledge.

Because of Christ in our hearts, we are “rooted and grounded in love” (3:17). Our behavior every day should grow out of our groundedness in love. We are meant to know “the breadth and length and height and depth [of] the love of Christ,” even to “be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:18–19).

Wow! That’s a tall order. I don’t know if I can hold that much God in me! But it’s my assignment. It’s what is expected, so I’m ready for it, at least in my mind, even though I know that “the love of Christ surpasses knowledge” (3:19). I can intellectually accept the fact that the love of Christ will surpass my knowledge, my intellect.

Certainly his miracles surpass my intellectual capacity to explain. But I believe that Jesus was the creator of this world, as Colossians says (“in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers” Col 1:16), so he has creator power. And he manifested his creator power in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, a story that is present in all four gospels. Can you imagine sitting on the hillside with your family and hearing this amazing man sharing his knowledge of the Father’s love, then helping yourself to the food being passed around, and hearing people whispering about how all of this food came from five loaves and two fish?

When I think of this, I feel myself in the presence of unparalleled creative power, and yet the circumstances are very down to earth: families sitting down on the grass and waiting for food to be passed around. Jesus cared about mundane needs: about the need for wine at a wedding, or the need for lunch at an outdoor gathering, or the need for one’s beloved daughter or brother to be healed. He attended to these needs. But he fundamentally wanted to attend to the spiritual needs of the people, and so he preached to them.

Despite his desire to reach the ordinary people with spiritual assistance, they mainly noticed his extraordinary power over nature, and they tried to make him a king, as we read in the final verse (6:15). They were ready to rise up and proclaim him king. But he literally walked away from them and refused this adulation. Later in this gospel, he says “my kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). He didn’t need or desire earthly power. He desired to enlighten people, to inspire them to spiritual living. And he did inspire many, although some felt threatened by him. In verse 14 here we have thee crowd saying “this must be the prophet who is coming into the world.” This would have thrilled some people, but frightened many who were in positions of power.

Even with him repudiating political power, he was perceived as threatening by those who were obsessed with clinging to power. Indeed, all of Judea and Galilee, and then the world, would have been changed if the majority of the population had decided to follow his teachings. The priesthood clung to their rules and rituals. Jesus’ teaching would have weakened their control of the over the people, who felt they had to continue to purchase sacrificial animals to cleanse the impurity they believed they had caused. The people would have been freed from this slavery to ritual and fear of impurity. Sadly, then, it must be admitted that the Sadducees were correct to feel that their way of life was threatened by this prophet.

What if Jesus had gone the political route, had accepted the kingship into which his followers tried to push him? He would have undermined his spiritual mission. He would not have given us the pure and unblemished revelation of truth and love and nonviolence that he gave us, and would not have revealed the truth he set out reveal.

This decision that Jesus made, and which he did not hesitate to make, preserved the purity and dignity of his life mission. The conquests of the spirit are not assisted by political power. It would have hindered, not helped, his spiritual revelation if he had accepted the kingship. It likely would have led to an uprising against the Romans, which would have pleased Peter and Simon Zelotes, and maybe others, but it would have compromised his message.

It’s hard to know what lessons we can draw from this for our personal lives, since we don’t have such miraculous power. We aren’t in danger of being made kings by popular acclamation. But we do face the temptation of compromising our principles, saying “bending this one rule won’t hurt things,” but, in fact, it *does* hurt things. Sometimes you have to make procedural compromises, but you don’t want to compromise your essential principles. You don’t want to gain the world and lose your own soul (Matt 16:26 NIV).

Frank Serpico grew up in Brooklyn. His uncle had been a respected police officer in Italy, and Frank ended up becoming a New York police officer. He became a full patrolman in 1960 and went into undercover work. Throughout the 60s he reported on police corruption that he witnessed. No action was taken until a big story in the press broke in 1970, and Mayor John Lindsey formed a commission to investigate corruption. In 1971 Serpico was shot in the face by a drug dealer. His fellow officers left him lying on the floor without calling it in. A neighbor called it in, and emergency services took Serpico to the hospital, where he was treated. He retired not long afterward.

If Serpico had compromised his principles and not reported the bribes he saw taking place, he would have promoted his career, but he would have been corrupted. He has remained an honest man, speaking up against the mistreatment of prisoners such as Abner Louima (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank\_Serpico). He has remained true to his morals and has received honors for what he did. Refusing to compromise with evil can lead to painful consequences. But it is better to save one’s soul than to gain the whole world, or worldly power.

As you go forth this week, stay true to your inner voice, align yourself to the truth. Grow in your understanding that you are loved as you are. You are an essential part of this friendly universe family. Yes, *you*! And God’s universe is filled with love!