

Sermon from June 7, 2015 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

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Family is important to most of us. We are deeply influenced by the families that we grew up in. We tend to think of the values they shared with us, and the way they did things, as normal and normative. Thus, when a new family is being formed, there are many discussions, some of them heated, about who makes what decisions, who does which household chores, how holidays will be celebrated, and how money will be handled. Often, the persons in the new partnership begin with the idea that how his or her family handled a matter is the way it is supposed to be done. Alternative approaches (like those of our partner) are negatively evaluated, and rejected at first.

Others of us come to the task of creating our own families with the determination that our family will be different than the one we grew up in. We will not make those bruising mistakes that our parents did! Because of our hurt, we may be unable to recognize what was helpful about the approach of our parents, and our perspective becomes skewed. Caught in our hurt, it may be difficult to be appreciative of the suggestions of our partner that challenge our determination to do certain things in a way completely different way from that of our parents.

Often we come to the task of creating a new partnership and/or family with both these perspectives. Intimate relationships, chief among them marriage and parenthood, become a crucible for growing up, for learning to love maturely. A handful of people called monastics grow to wholeness (or holiness) through stepping out of the world in which the rest of us live, and embracing celibacy, poverty and obedience. Most of us grow toward wholeness (or holiness) not only in this world, but because of it. We learn acceptance and openness from our imperfect and infuriatingly different, yet attractive, spouse. We strive to find a balance between asserting our own needs, and deferring to the needs of others, because we want a family which is both peaceful and supportive of the unique needs of all the family members. We become more thoughtful about our management and use of money because children or others are depending on us for both financial support and a moral example. The frustrations, the joys, and the responsibilities of family life nudge us to mature as Christians: to grow in love, and in gratitude for the support God gives us when we ask for help along the way.

In today's gospel, Jesus' family appear to be attempting what we would call an intervention today. It hasn't been long since Jesus left the carpenter shop, and already he's in trouble. The things he

says are new and bold. The ordinary people delight in his teachings and insights. However, the religious authorities are offended. Jesus heals, and casts out demons, and the ordinary people find hope. The authorities, on the other hand, are threatened. With his courageous preaching and deeds of power, Jesus frightens the authorities and puts himself at risk. Already, they are talking about getting rid of him. And in this story they begin to spread the dangerous rumor that Jesus can cast out demons only because he is possessed by a demon, that is, he can overcome evil powers, only because he is more evil himself. Jesus argues vigorously and successfully against this charge.

But, before he does, Jesus' family attempts to intervene. They want to save him from himself, reign him in so that he can live a long, quiet life. But, Jesus' family cannot save him. Jesus is the Savior. It is He who will save them. He will save them by being himself: caring, strong and bold, stirring up controversy, excitement, and opposition wherever he goes. For Jesus' family to save him for a long, quiet life in Galilee, would be to kill his soul, to thwart God's purpose in sending him to earth, and to destroy his reason for being.

And so Jesus asks a provocative question when the crowd tells him that his mother and siblings are outside, asking for him. He

inquires, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Then looking around at those who have come to learn from him, he says, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

With this provocative question and answer, Jesus blows open the notion of family. Although our biological relatives are to be treasured, our families are much larger than that. Everyone who does the will of God is part of our family. We are all related. We are family in this church, and beyond this church too.

This is great news for us. A village is here, right here, to help us raise our children and cheer on our grandchildren. No matter if our biological family is small, and quickly shrinking. Our memory will be cherished when we are gone, by the people here with whom we have bonded as family.

During one of the tsunamis that hit Indonesia several years ago, a mother hippo was separated from her baby. The baby was swept down the river and into the oceans. He was tossed back to shore thousands of miles from his home, and rescued by wildlife workers there. They worried about the baby hippo, whom they named Owen, because they had no other hippos in the wildlife sanctuary. Who would give the baby hippo the nurturing care he

needed? Who would be his family? The wildlife workers need not have worried. Shortly after his arrival at the shelter, Owen was adopted by a tortoise, who acted as his mother. All day long they swam together. All night long they slept together. They became family to one another.

Who do you know that might need you as part of their family? Who will be your hippo? To whom can you be a tortoise? In Christ, we are family to one another.

A sixth century monk named Dorotheus once drew a large circle, with lines that reached from the outside of the circle (or circumference) to its center point. He said that each line (or radius) represented the life of a human being, and that the center point of the circle is God. He asked his audience to notice what happened to the individual lines as they came closer to the center: they became much closer to one another!

May God who calls us to himself, also bind us together in familial love.

AMEN.