

**Sunday 6th June 2021 – Trinity 1
Holy Communion**

Families

[Genesis 3: 8- 15](#)

[Mark 3:20-35](#)

“Families,” my mother used to sigh deeply when my brother, or I, or more often both of us, had been particularly exasperating. “Who’d have ‘em?”

Twenty five years later, as I was bringing up my own children, I was heard (occasionally) to mutter the same. I suspect my own boys, with 2 year olds of their own, probably have a contemporary version.

That’s the light-hearted view. But I know that it’s a sad truth that not every experience of family can be so easily laughed off, and if that applies to you, then firstly, I am deeply saddened that that has been your story; and secondly, please hang on in with this talk because there *is* good news to be heard.

But wherever we come from in our family background, I am pretty sure that most of us can in some way empathise with Mary, the mother of Jesus, when the news reaches her that her eldest son is causing a bit of a commotion in the district. So, off she goes, with some of her other sons and daughters, to talk some sense into him and/or to bring him back home where they can keep an eye on him.

When they arrive, Jesus is deep in another altercation with the religious leaders – the contents of which, you will be pleased to hear, we are *not* going to go into today. And when he is told that his Mum and brothers are outside he responds with one of those “did Jesus *really* say that??” comments...

‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’

And he looks at those sitting around him and says, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.’

What is going on? Is he really turning his back on his own family???

Well, the key to unlock both this morning’s readings is ‘relationships.’

The first reading was part of the story of the Garden of Eden from the very first book in the Bible. The first man and first woman, Adam and Eve, have been living in perfect relationship with God and all God’s creation in the garden – until the serpent gets involved and they both choose their own way over God’s way. In the story-poem, they eat the forbidden fruit. And we’ve just heard the result of that

Their relationship with God is fractured

Their relationship with each other is fractured, as they blame each other

Even the relationship with all God has created is fractured.

And as we look around today, we can see the effect of those broken relationships all around us: from the global level right down to the personal level – and even sometimes within ourselves – relationships are fractured and flawed. And for those of us with a sense of the reality of God, we can see that all this stems from the fracturing of humanity's key relationship – with God.

But hang on, I hear you say. You promised me Good News in this talk. It doesn't sound all that good at the moment. In fact, you're depressing me. And you still haven't explained why Jesus was apparently so rude to his Mum and the rest of his family.

Fair point. Here goes....

The story of Jesus goes on. And part way through he goes to Jerusalem, is betrayed by one of his closest followers, and dies a dreadful death, nailed to a cross. Three days later he is raised from the dead. It is all unfathomable. But in the hundreds of years since then, thousands, millions of people, just like us, have experienced the reality of the presence of the living Jesus in their own lives.

And there are many deep interpretations of this greatest of mysteries but at their heart they all come back to the restoration of those fractured relationships we talked about earlier.

The upright of the cross speaks of the restored relationship between us and God...

The crossbar speaks of restored relationships with each other...

And the outstretched arms of Jesus speaks of his welcome to all who want to accept it...

And when we do... what then?

The restored relationship with God means that instead of seeing him as a distant, maybe even angry figure, we see him as the one who loves us unconditionally, just as we are. Like the prodigal son in the story, we are welcomed home by the perfect Father. Whatever our age, we become a child of God.

And this revolutionises our relationship with each other. Because if we are all children of God, that means we are all part of God's family. So when Jesus looked around at those who were with him and said "these are my sisters and brothers" he wasn't *rejecting* his birth family. He was looking forward to when his work would be completed and God's *new* family would be established.

And incidentally, as Jesus' story is told, it becomes clear that his own family do become his followers. His mother was at the cross, and part of the early church. And one of his brothers became head of the church in Jerusalem and subsequently died for his faith.

So, in a very real sense, we – the Church, the people of God – are the family of God. And this gives us a new relationship with each other. A relationship we remember every time we say the Lord's Prayer together

Our....

Father....

The Father of us all. We are family.

So what does this mean?

Well, first of all, it's important to note that we are not yet a perfect family. But with God as our Father one day we will be – and for those whose own family story is painful, this is good news. God holds out to us the possibility of a good and healthy family, one where we can all grow and flourish, and even if we are not there yet, we are on the way.

And so what does this look like?

My Dad's descendants share a family characteristic - a particular "bump" on our nose, which develops as we reach our teenage years. In a similar way, as children of God we begin to develop His family characteristics – self-giving love, welcome, acceptance, a desire to see others grow and flourish, justice, mercy, forgiveness. We're not there yet – no church community is – but as we draw closer to God we will draw closer to each other and we will begin to allow these beautiful thing to grow here.

Healthy families are the place where we can truly be ourselves. Where we don't have to put on a mask and pretend everything is ok when it's not. Where - let's be honest – we can have our rough corners chipped off and then sanded smooth again. Where we can dare to be vulnerable and to accept help when it is offered. Because families are bound by an unbreakable tie.

Until recently I wasn't close to my brother – but at particularly dreadful period of my life he just turned up to help. Un-requested and without any expectation of 'reward', he came – because he is my brother. In our Shirley churches we have been pretty good at this during the pandemic, but there is still so much more we can do. There is a fear of offering – and a fear of accepting – help. I needed my brother at that time. He offered. I accepted. Because he was my brother.

And families have a shared story. Get a family together, especially if they haven't seen each other for a while, and before long it will be "do you remember...?" As new members join the family, they will be initiated into the story of the missing Extremely Chocolately Chocolate Roll, or someone else's amusing teenage mishap. Shared stories help us to know each other, to truly belong to each other. It happens in our church family as we listen to the stories of God from the Bible, and as we remember the self-giving death of Jesus as we share in Holy Communion together, as we will do shortly. Stories which we share with others as we welcome them, and they too come to belong to this very special family of God.

If you're in the building, look around and see, not just people who you come to church with, but fellow members of God's family. We belong together. These people are not strangers

who you happen to see on a Sunday - In a very special way they are your sisters and your brothers.

So, as we come out of lockdown, you have permission.

You have permission to ask the name of the person you have known by sight for 20 years. Do you know what? – I bet they are wondering what your name is too. Why not be the one to say “I’m Jemima, I live on the High Street” and see what happens. (I’d recommend using your own name and location though!)

When someone asks “how are you?” it’s ok to say “actually, I’m worried about a hospital appointment”.

When you ask – listen. Remember FINE stands for “feeling in need of encouragement”! If someone has an issue, you don’t need to solve the problem, just be there for the person and support them. Maybe offer to pray with or for them. Be discreet. Get permission if you think that it should be shared with someone who can help more. If it’s a safeguarding concern, speak to the Vicar.

And, and things unlock further, if you see someone struggling to stand, or find a place in a book, or anything else – offer to assist. And if you need help, then feel free to accept it. Following Jesus is something we do *together*.

And we’re not talking about prying, or being intrusive. Of course we respect others’ boundaries. But if everyone is too reticent to take the first step, we won’t really be family will we?

And we won’t be able to demonstrate to a world full of broken relationships what a difference it makes to us to accept God’s love.

And God knows, the world needs His love to restore it to how things were always meant to be.

So may God bless us, as together we seek to belong to Him and to each other. May we invite, welcome and help others to belong too. And may we play our part in restoring what is hurtful and broken in God’s beautiful world.