

Sermon for Proper 5 Year B

God calls us to expand our family
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[1 Samuel 8:4-11, \(12-15\), 16-20, \(11:14-15\)](#) and [Psalm 138](#) (Track 2: [Genesis 3:8-15](#) and [Psalm 130](#));
[2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1](#); [Mark 3:20-35](#)

Family. We all come from one. Some are loving, some are quirky, some are dysfunctional, some are abusive, and some are a combination of those things. No matter what type of family we have, we have a role to play within it: the Peacemaker, the Pretty One, the Black Sheep, the Smart One, the Religious One, the Baby, and so on. But what happens when the Black Sheep starts acting like the Smart One? Or the Peacemaker becomes the Artistic One? The delicate system of roles is shaken and the other players must try to put the person back in their role or adjust to the new role that is being played. Guess which one folks usually choose?

Fear of the new role usually wins out, and people often try to sabotage the fledgling before anything permanent can happen. We think we know what is best for the other person because really, it is best for us. Take any self-improvement – losing weight, quitting smoking, going back to school, going to a counselor – and there will be people who will not be encouraging because it makes them look at the improvements they need to make and aren't. They fear change in their lives, so why should they support the changes in yours? It takes a strong person to become who God created us to be and to continue to make positive changes when it puts personal relationships in jeopardy.

Look at Jesus coming back to his hometown where his family lived. People were crowding him to see if he would heal them, but some were talking about him, “He’s gone out of his mind,” and “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” People feared what they did not understand. Jesus’ family tried to restrain him, but Jesus faced the crowd. He was called by God to preach and teach and heal, and that was his focus. He knew his role, but it was not necessarily the role that his family or hometown thought he should be in. God was doing a new thing in Jesus. God was expanding what it meant to be bonded to another person the way we are in a family, and Jesus called attention to this. God knows what is best for Jesus and for us, not the other way around.

When Jesus declared, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother,” it challenged the Jewish culture around him. No longer are you close to God because you were born into a Jewish household; no longer do you just take care of your own kind; instead, your family is being extended to anyone who does the will of God.

That certainly broadens the margins and challenges those who took that relationship with God for granted. Today, it challenges us to look beyond our walls, our denominational lines, our socio-economic status, and our faith to see our brothers and sisters and mothers. God calls us to expand our family in ways that are just as shocking as it was to the Gospel of Mark’s first-century audience.

We should come to expect this from God. How successful are we when left to our own devices? In today’s Old Testament lesson from First Samuel, when the people request an earthly king to rule them rather than God, Samuel is in a difficult position. The very request is a rebellion against God. But the Israelites want to be “like other nations.” How often do we want the same thing? We want to be

“normal,” we want to have what other people have and we measure our worth by earthly standards. We lose our focus and stop doing the will of God. Brothers turn against brothers, sisters against sisters, mothers against mothers. We get caught up in wanting approval from others and are jealous of what they have, which can leave us empty and seemingly worthless. We forget that we have value because God loves us. Jesus understood this. He kept his focus on following God’s will and was clear about it, despite what his family or the crowds wanted from him.

It’s easier said than done, of course. Anthony de Mello tells a story that reminds us of this: A man traversed land and sea to check out for himself the Master’s extraordinary fame. “What miracles has your Master worked?” he asked a disciple.

“Well, there are miracles and miracles. In your land it is regarded as a miracle if God does someone’s will. In our country it is regarded as a miracle if someone does the will of God.” We may smile at the story, but it speaks truth. Doing the will of God often means leaving our comfort zones. As Episcopalians, our Baptismal Covenant demands a life that follows God by continuing in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, in the prayers, resisting evil, repenting and returning to the Lord, proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves, striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being. This is not an easy road to journey! Yet we readily answer, “I will, with God’s help.”

We cannot do this alone. Jesus’ single-minded focus on God’s will is an example to us. We must have God’s help to follow the call of Jesus in order to be the people we were created to be. May we go forth, as the blessing from St. Clare says, to “live without fear: your Creator has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you as a mother. Go in peace to follow the good road, and may God’s blessing be with you always.”

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