

Jesus' Family

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The Community Church of Sebastopol
May 11, 2014 Mother's Day

Matthew 12: 46-50

I miss Calvin and Hobbes, the comic strip by Bill Watterson that featured the impetuous and often impossible young boy, Calvin, and his imaginary tiger friend, Hobbes, who often was the most rational individual of all. On this Mother's Day, I recall one strip in particular: It's a rainy day. Calvin asks, "Can Hobbes and I go play in the rain, Mom?"

"No," she answers.

"Why not?"

"You'll get soaked."

"What's wrong with that?" he asks.

She answers, "You could catch pneumonia, run up a terrible hospital bill, linger a few months, and die."

Calvin turns and looks back out the window as he mutters to himself, "I always forget. If you ask a mom, you always get a worse-case scenario."

To which Hobbes adds, "I had no idea a little rain was so dangerous."

Calvin's interaction with his mother rather reminds me of Jesus' interaction with his mother in our text for today. He has just had some major conflict with the scribes and Pharisees. They have accused him of blasphemy for healing on the Sabbath... a serious charge. In turn, he has referred to them as "You brood of vipers!" Opposition to his ministry is building and growing dangerous. Then, into the middle of all this come his mother and brothers. They want to speak with him, perhaps offer him a word of support or encouragement. We can't know for sure what their intentions were, but they do want to meet with him. Does he run out and embrace them with open arms, sharing a loving moment with his family? Not even close.

And right here one could say that Jesus presents us with a worse-case scenario. He doesn't even get up and acknowledge them. Instead he asks, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Another potential Hallmark moment lost forever. What a horrible text for Mother's Day – for the celebration of family and home. Mother Mary comes to him wanting to say, "Let it be," and he basically says to her and her brothers, "Get back to where you once belonged..." I am reminded of the story told by Luke of the boy, Jesus, in the temple. He runs off and his parents cannot find him. When they finally do, their first question is, "Why have you treated us like this?" I wonder if Mary was thinking the same thing after this encounter?

What do you think? Is Jesus putting down the concept of family... something most of us treasure with all our hearts, something many of us say we would die for? I suppose that's possible. Maybe he just wasn't a family type of guy – always sent the Mother's Day card late if he sent it at all. Or could there be something else going on here?

I recently took a road trip to the Northwest. It's been a while since I have taken a long trip on the road, but it certainly seems that things have changed. I am not exaggerating when I say that at almost every rest stop, picnic area and gas station along I-5, I was approached by a person or persons needing help. All had a story: "I need money for gas so I can see my father in Davis who is dying from cancer; I need \$35.00 for a new alternator. We have been living in our car for the past two days." One man offered to wash my windows. Some I helped with money and/or food, some I did not. I suspect I was less generous the longer I was on the road. Who knows if their stories of trial and tribulation were true? I suppose it really didn't matter. But I have a word of confession. More and more I found myself thinking... "I'm so thankful I'm not like them. I am grateful that I'm not one of them." But wait, am I not the same preacher who from this pulpit has said more than once that we are called to see the body of Christ in every broken and hurting human body, to trace the face of Christ on every dirty and grimy face. It was Jesus himself who said, "I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you." That woman, with the empty gas can, asking for spare change.... I am her, and she is me;

Christ in her as surely as Christ is in me. Could this be where Jesus is taking us... to a much broader concept of family than we ever thought possible; toward a vision of family that is deeper, wider, and more inclusive than a group of people who happen to have the same genetic endowment? Who is my mother, who are my brothers? Look about you!

“No man – no one – is an island,” John Donne wrote, “entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main...Any man’s death diminishes me because I am involved in Mankind. And, therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee.”

Reflecting on these words, Frederick Buechner has written: “As we move around this world and as we act with kindness, perhaps, or with indifference, or with hostility, toward the people we meet, we are setting the great spider web of life a-tremble. The life that I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place and time my touch will be felt. Our lives are linked together.” Me and that woman with the gas can... linked together

I once read about a yearly project at Concordia College in Morehead, Minnesota, just across the river from Fargo, North Dakota. This is not exactly one of the garden spots of the United States, but it can be particularly bleak in the winter. But all year the community anticipates Concordia’s annual Christmas concert. Each year, a huge choir and a full orchestra give a musical performance in the concert hall at the college.

And every year, the people in the community create a unique background for the concert – a one hundred by thirty foot mosaic. Beginning in the summer, about six months before the concert, the community designs a new mosaic, rents an empty building, and the painting begins. Thousands of people, from junior high school students to senior citizens paint the mosaic. They paint by number on a large-scale design that has thousands and thousands of tiny pieces. Day after day, month after month, one little painted piece at a time, the picture on the mosaic gradually takes shape.

When everyone has finished painting, an artist goes over the entire creation, perfecting the final work of art. When it is completed it is placed behind the choir in the concert hall. It has the appearance of an enormous, beautiful stained-glass window. (slides were shown of recent mosaics) The weekend of the concert, the people who helped paint it arrive early, along with friends and neighbors. Throughout the building you can hear people whispering, “See that little green spot below the camel’s foot? I painted it.”

Every year in the middle of the summer in Morehead, Minnesota, thousands of unknown, ordinary people paint a tiny, insignificant tile. Six months later, the result is a spectacularly beautiful masterpiece.

I think that is how Jesus wants us to see our lives – each tiny act of love or caring, every seemingly unimportant choice, every word – contributing to the enormous mosaic which is our human family. And we have the power to help make it beautiful – every tiny piece, our piece, so vitally important. And here we thought we were so different because of race, gender, clan, religion, economic level or politics. Jesus insists that family is not as much a matter of whose chromosomes we carry around inside of us, but rather whose image we are created in. Says Barbara Brown Taylor, “Jesus’ family became huge beyond counting, with lepers and tax collectors and Roman centurions in it, with scruffy looking men who smelled of fish and ladies in robes made of gold brocade and hordes of squealing children. There was no family tree in his bible. It was more like a family forest he walked around in, with relatives collected from all over the place...”

And so, when we meet as strangers, even when friends look like strangers, let us remember that we need each other greatly, you and I, more than much of the time we dare to imagine, more than most of the time we dare to admit. And let us dare to speak the holy and healing word, the loving word, which is: “God be with you stranger who is no stranger. I wish you well.”

And who knows, through our not so random words and acts of caring and kindness, we just might produce something like this. (pointing to one of the Concordia College mosaics)