

FAMILY MATTERS 1

“Where we’re Headed”

*God decided in advance to adopt us into his own **family** by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear son. Eph.1:5*

2009 has dawned with a vengeance, hasn't it? New president, continuing fiscal uncertainty, wars continue to be fought; children are still dying from bad water and poor medicine, and evil governments. All the regular litanies of societal dangers like drugs and alcohol have been replaced by an obsession with doom and gloom on every hand! Add to that, unbelievable amounts of snow, and bitter cold, and more on the way say the forecasters of each!

Any of the above might prove worthy subjects for a series, maybe even a year long theme...so why have we chosen to focus on the family in 2009? I have multiple answers but only one that reigns: THE FAMILY IS STILL THE BASIC INSTITUTION GOD HAS DESIGNED TO NURTURE, PROTECT, AND GROW HUMAN BEINGS INTO FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS OF JESUS! In the midst of all the before mentioned difficulties; one institution has the potential to bring peace on earth, one institution has the potential to bring health and wholeness to humankind, one institution has been called by God to grow children into adults, and adults into faithful followers...it is the family.

The family is a multi-faceted, hard to define, sometimes dysfunctional, sometimes unrecognizable entity that exists as an extension of God's trinity for the salvation of humankind. Oh, we all know that families can't save anyone's souls, but we also know that the power of Christ's salvation is best communicated when it's lived out in the context of a healthy family.

So for all those and a hundred other reasons, in 2009 I'm going to be leading us to focus on strengthening families...because Family Matters. We'll be dealing with all kind of Family Matters...raising teenagers, nurturing children, taking care of aging parents. We'll be dealing with and talking about all kinds of families, divorced families, widowed and widower families, extended families, nuclear families, single-parent families, and single member families. I'll be discussing marriage and the family; and we'll spend late this summer and early fall discussing the Family of God; our church as a family of God. We'll talk about the Family in relation to the church and the church in relation to the Kingdom; all in the context of family. I plan to speak about Faithful Family Finances in November, and I'll have an unusual challenge for each family to consider during a Christmas series titled: Christmas Is Not your Birthday: Creating a New Family Tradition.

Over the next few weeks I'll be talking about some of the characteristics that make a family work, and make a family healthy, and hopefully make a family holy. We'll discuss Family Relationships, Family Roles, and Family Responsibilities. During Lent I'll be exploring 7 great fears all of us face and how being part of a nurturing family, and leaning heavily on heavenly faith, can help us live through those fears. In late April and May I plan to lean on some other 'experts' and discuss parenting children, teenagers, adult children and aging parents. So let me begin today.

As much as I love our text this morning:

*God decided in advance to adopt us into his own **family** by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear son. Eph.1:5*

I must caution you if you think that there is a “Biblical” model for what a Godly Family ought to look like. I believe that the human family and the family of God have been given instruction in the Word, and we’ll explore all that we can in the next 12 months, but the biblical picture of family is not what you might think.

Consider the original family. Adam and Eve seemed perfect in their naked existence, then came a serpent, an apple, some fig leaves, shame and hiding, and before you know it, one of their sons murders his brother! Not exactly a perfect “Biblical” family in my opinion.

Maybe we should consider another family model in the Old Testament. How about looking into the family of the Father of the Hebrew faith, the First Family of Israel you might say; Abraham and Sarah. This cute elderly couple has faithfully led the nation of Israel in following God to its independence as God’s Chosen people; surely they are the perfect family. No, they don’t have a son, they are childless well into their retirement years, and this curse has dogged them forever.

God hears their plight, and promises to answer their prayers...but before it can be fulfilled, they concoct their own little plan to have old Abe make a baby with Hagar, one of Sarah’s maiden’s or more accurately one of their slaves! Nice. Good “Hebrew” family example.

Well, surely if we look to another Giant in Israel’s faith...lets consider King David...I suppose we all know how that turned out, since most of us know him more by his adulterous mistress, than the name of his wife. Bathsheba probably wasn’t part of God’s plan for a “Biblical” family you think?

Did you know that there are 8 different types of marriage mentioned in the Old Testament? There is the standard one man one woman Nuclear family, but there were many polygamous marriages. There was the Levirate marriage where a widow was automatically married to her oldest brother-in-law.

There were marriages of a man, a woman, and her slaves (Hagar). There were many cases of multiple wives and numerous concubines; the great King Solomon being maybe the most notorious with 500 wives and 700 concubines! Did you know that if a male soldier raped a female prisoner of war she was married to him, and he could not divorce her? A male rapist and his victim or victims were automatically married. Do you think this is what God had in mind when he instituted the Institution of Marriage or founded the Family? I don't either.

And all I really have to say about any of this is this: If God can redeem, save, forgive, and use people who created or were raised in families like these...what hope that must give us! God is never restricted in how God works because of our past, our present or our circumstances! God is able to take even the most perverse situations, and make good come from them.

Maybe we should look to Jesus, and the New Testament, surely there we'll find a better description of what a Biblical Family should look like. Let's listen to a few of Jesus' more famous dissertations on family: Luke 12:51-53 might be a good place to start:

Do you think I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I have come to divide people against each other! From now on families will be split apart, three in favor of me, and two against – or two in favor and three against. 'Father will be divided against son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother; and mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

Wow, not exactly what you were expecting huh? Let's try another: Luke 14:26-27

"If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison – your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even your own life. Otherwise you cannot be my disciple."

These examples were obviously presented to you, out of context, and can be explained when you place them there. Jesus was saying that we must love Him more than anything else in the world, more than our families, more than our lives.

In the earlier passage he was warning his disciples that deciding to follow him might cause estrangement from even those you would think might love you through it all. We are living in a day when giving your allegiance to Jesus, really choosing to follow him, is causing considerable heartache for many. Many young people who are giving their lives to Jesus are being ostracized by family members who don't get it. Many baby boomers are having trouble with kids who reject their selfish, consumerist lifestyles, instead choosing to live more simply, even sacrificing their lives on mission fields and in service industries. It may not be as bad as the disciples had it, but we still see it.

So what is my point? Well, families are instituted by God, but created by us and the choices we make. Some families are great, wholesome, nurturing, caring, helpful, and some are largely dysfunctional, and some moderately so. It might even be accurate to say all families are dysfunctional, at some and varying levels. In spite of that, in spite of the NT words of Jesus, and the OT record of wayward saints...God still believes in the family. God still loves families. God still plants each one of us in a family; none of us is born alone! Our families may all look and act and function differently but family is still God's idea.

There is hope for our families, and I hope to help build and strengthen the families God is sending our way, the families who've been here for years and the family of God at FUMC over the next year.