

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Trinity Sunday, May 22, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 391, 182, 226:1-5, 188:1-3, 26:6.

Lessons: Joshua 24:14-27, Romans 8:12-17, Matthew 12:26-50.

Sermon Text: Mark 3:31-35.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Greek and Roman mythology is full of false gods and their descendants, many of whom were also worshiped as gods. In many ancient societies, rulers were thought to be descendants of the pagan gods. Egyptian and other societies attributed god-like qualities to their rulers and honored them as if they were gods. So it has been a goal or characteristic of humans to want to be like gods. After all, wasn't that one of the lies of Satan when he told Eve *“You will not surely die, the serpent said to the woman. For God knows that when you eat of [the tree of knowledge of good and evil] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”* Genesis 3:4-5 (NIV)

Jesus, as the Son of God, did more than make such a goal merely fictitious or mythological. God made everyone who believes in him a child of the true God, adopted by working faith in Jesus as the only Savior of mankind from all sins.

Today, we look at the text before us, and other Scriptures, and explore the question

WHO IS THE FAMILY OF JESUS?

- 1. Those who follow him.**
- 2. Those who believe in him, trust in him, rely on him and obey his Words.**

I think that everyone wants “family”. Everyone wants to belong to a group, and what group has opportunity to be closer than “family”? Today we talk about a very special family, the family of God. In our text Jesus was surrounded by people who were listening to his words. Then we read that some of his brothers and his mother were calling him and wanted his attention.

The term brothers probably refers to other children of Mary and Joseph, yet they could have been extended family, possibly cousins. But exactly who they were is not important. The real point of Jesus' lesson today is that spiritual family is more important than physical family. This may be something that you have personally experienced.

Jesus does not show partiality just because of any blood relationship. He allows everyone the privilege of becoming part of his family simply by believing in him. This includes the blessing of hearing the Word of God and keeping it.

In our increasingly computerized ‘social-media’ world, warm relationships among members of God's family become more important. Fellow confessors of Christ, the visible church, should give the loving personalized care that many people find no where else.

However, we dare not think that Jesus was callous, ignoring his family ties. We read in Matthew 13 that he did have an earthly family, and that he, the Son of Mary and Son of God, was not appreciated in his home town. *“When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?’ they asked. ‘Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man*

get all these things?’ And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, ‘Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.’ And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.” Matthew 13:53-58 (NIV)

Jesus recognized the importance of family and he criticized religious teachers for breaking what we learned as the Fourth Commandment: “Honor your father and mother.” We read in Matthew 15: *“Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, ‘Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!’ Jesus replied, ‘And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, “Honor your father and mother” and “Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.” But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,” he is not to honor his father with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.””* Matthew 15:1-9 (NIV)

Jesus also provided for his mother after his death. For during Jesus’ days on earth, there was no such thing as Social Security or Retirement Benefits as we think of them today. *“Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.”* John 19:25-27 (NIV)

As Jesus loved his mother, so he loves us and he willingly obeyed his Father, being obedient unto death. We read in Philippians 2 about Jesus *“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!”* Philippians 2:6-8 (NIV)

Of course, all three persons of the Triune God loved us, including his Father who really loved us, too. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* John 3:16 (NIV)

And Jesus loved us enough to give up his life. In the letter to the Romans, Paul concludes a section about justification by faith with these words: *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”* Romans 5:1-5 (NIV)

Part of that abundance of love which Christ has poured out into our hearts is becoming part of his family.

Christ offers us an intimate family relationship with him. You heard in our Epistle lesson *“because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”* Romans 8:14-17 (NIV)

Paul also writes in Galatians 3: *“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”* Galatians 3:26-29 (NIV)

We are adopted children of God, adopted by him because of his love for us. It is by faith, because of faith, which was worked in us by the Holy Ghost that we receive the benefit of that adoption. Our faith was created and is fed by the Holy Spirit of God. All who believe in Christ are children of God. There is no favoritism, no preference for Jew or Gentile, no preference for one skin color over another.

In the Roman world, adopted children lost all rights to the old family. They became full heirs of the new family and gained all the privileges and responsibilities of the new family.

So, too, the Christian gains all the privileges and responsibilities of the new family.

John assures us ***“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”*** John 1:12-13 (NIV2011)

As God’s children, as members of God’s family, one of those outstanding privileges is being led by the Spirit. Scripture tells us ***“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”*** Galatians 4:6-7 (NIV)

As members of God’s family we are called to love – to love God, to love one another, to love all of mankind. We read in John’s first epistle that ***“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”*** 1 John 5:1-5 (NIV)

There you see some of the earmarks, the characteristics of Jesus’ family. Jesus’ family are those who hear and obey his words. Hearing without obeying is not enough. When a woman commented how blessed Jesus’ mother was, we read that ***“he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”*** Luke 11:28 (KJV)

Willing obedience follows from faith. There is such a thing as obedience because of fear. Sometimes we obey and do things because of fear of being punished, or fear that our reputation will suffer, thinking of what bad things might happen to us if we do not obey. But the new man, the born-again child of God obeys God in a willing, obedient spirit.

In this way the members of the family of God show love. John, who has been called the apostle of love, in his first letter especially speaks of love, God’s love for mankind, God’s love for his family, and then the love God’s family members have for others. He says that ***“We love him [God], because he first loved us.”*** 1 John 4:19 (KJV) He goes on in that letter to speak of the importance especially of those who are part of the family of God showing love.

Listen to how John in that letter speaks of the love of God for us ***“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”*** 1 John 3:1-3 (NIV)

And so we, by faith, we are truly blessed that God could say of us: ***“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*** Galatians 3:26-27 (NIV)

What a joy that Christ could come into our midst here today and say ***“Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”***

May we always strive to do God’s will to show our faith and show the family we joyfully belong to!
Amen.