

Reflection on the Word: May 13, 2018 "Christian Family Sunday" - Psalm 1; John 17:6-19

Beginning with Jesus, each and every generation has been blessed with some very gifted preachers ... and among the best of our time is American preacher Rev. Dr. Fred Craddock.

Craddock tells a story about vacationing with his wife one summer in Tennessee. They had gone to a restaurant, where they looked forward to a good meal and some quiet time together. While they were waiting for their food, they noticed a man moving from table to table, visiting with the guests. Craddock leaned over and whispered to his wife, "I hope he doesn't come over here." But sure enough, the man did come over to their table. "Where you folks from?" he asked in a friendly voice.

"Oklahoma," Craddock answered.

"I've never been there, but I hear it's a great state," the stranger said. "What do you do for a living?"

"I teach homiletics at a seminary," Craddock replied.

"Oh, so you teach preachers how to preach, do you? Well, I've got a story to tell you." And with that, the gentleman pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with Craddock and his wife.

The man stuck out his hand. "I'm Ben Hooper," he said. "I was born not far from here across the mountains. My mother wasn't married when I was born, so I had a pretty hard time. When I started to school, my classmates had a name for me, and it wasn't a very nice name. I used to go off by myself at recess and lunchtime because the things they said to me really hurt ... cut deep. What was worse was going to town on Saturday afternoons and feeling the eyes of everyone staring at me, wondering just who my father was.

In our town, just about everybody went to church on Sunday. But because I always felt like I had something to be ashamed of ... I would go in late, and sit near the back so I could slip out early, avoiding people's staring eyes and whispers. When I was about 12 years old, we got a new preacher ... and I liked him a lot. But one day the preacher said the benediction so fast that I missed slipping out early and had to walk out with the crowd. I could feel every eye in the church on me. When I got to the door, the preacher put his big hand on my shoulder and looked right at me. 'Who are you, son? Whose boy are you?' he asked. Suddenly I felt this dark cloud coming over me. I worried that even the preacher was putting me down. But as he looked at me, studying my face, he began to smile a big smile of recognition. 'Wait a minute!' he said. 'I know who you are. I see the family resemblance now. You are a child of God.' And with that, he reached out and shook me by the hand, saying: 'Boy, you've got a great inheritance. Go and claim it.'

Having told his story, Ben Hooper then looked across the table at Fred Craddock and said, "Those were the most important words anybody ever said

to me, and I've never forgotten them: *'I see the family resemblance - you are a child of God.'*" And with that, he smiled, shook hands with Craddock and his wife, and moved on to another table.

On this Christian Family Sunday we celebrate that we are all children of God and that we have a great inheritance through Jesus Christ and all those gone before us who have served the church, lived the faith, and passed it on. The scripture for today contains words of Jesus' prayer for his disciples and for those of us who would come after. John's gospel, from the very start, unfolds for us a relationship in which the essence of God, the Father, was realized in Jesus. *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* In Jesus, we see the fullness of God revealed in a human life. We see God's love and mercy; God's inclusiveness and grace ... made real.

And so, when Jesus prays for his disciples, John records a prayer that is full of this relationship. Jesus prays that God will protect those who are his followers and give them the strength and endurance to continue as people following Jesus' way, even as they live in a world that might tempt and try to lead them on other paths. Jesus prays that his disciples will be one as he and his Father in heaven are one. And he says to God, "Just as you are in me, and I am in you... so may these people also be in us." Just like that, we are in relationship with Jesus and with God.

God is no longer a far-away deity, but a holy presence within each of us and within the community. We are family - brothers and sisters, cousins in the spirit of Christ. Today, on a day when we celebrate Christian Family Sunday, let's remember that it is the Spirit of the Holy, manifested in the power of love, that binds us together. When one rejoices, we all rejoice. When one suffers, we all suffer.

We are those who share not only a common name and a common identity as Christians - but we are also those designed to share a common purpose - to live our lives after the example of Jesus, in unity with God and the Holy Spirit. We are a community built on grace and hope and promise ... purposed by God, loved by Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, and called to the task of making God's love to be felt and Christ's light to shine in the world around us.

On this Mother's Day, which we in the church call "Christian Family Sunday", we bear in mind that not everyone's experiences of family or community are the same. Some people are blessed to be born into families, or communities that are nurturing, encouraging, sustaining, comforting. They grow secure in their place in the world, and confident that they are valuable, and loved. Others are born into situations that are less positive, that keep them from reaching their capacity to grow into healthy, happy, well-adjusted human beings.

We know, too, that this day can be hard for many people. Memories, good ones and painful ones, come to the surface with accompanying feelings of loss, regret or wishfulness. It can be a lonely day.

But may it also be a day when we remember that we are connected, not only to the families and communities in which we were raised, but to something larger... To a faith community where we offer love and support to each other, and where we have the opportunity and the responsibility to offer love and support to those who are outside of our church community, who really need what we can give.

Today, on this Christian Family Sunday, we celebrate who we are as a congregation and a family here at St. Andrew's. And to help us do that, I want to share some pictures:

On Sundays we gather for worship, and on the day of this photo, for a Celebration of the Scots.

It takes many people in a variety of leadership roles to do the work of the church – such as these folk who had served at some time as members of the Session. You will note that some of them are no longer with us ... the family is constantly changing.

Baptism, a sacrament of belonging and a first step on the faith journey, is celebrated here by grandmother, granddaughter and great granddaughter.

Waving the Palms as led by the Sunday School in the Palm Sunday Parade.

A solemn depiction of the last Supper in observance of Maundy Thursday.

The Last Post – Bill Hilchey leads us in a time for remembering those whose sacrifice won our freedom.

A celebration of the Nativity at Christmas Eve Family service.

This trio makes a joyful noise with their gift of song.

Soups on! for an after-church luncheon

As a church family – we sure do love to eat!

Something different – a summer service in the barn at Napan.

Enjoying the gift of God's great outdoors and a wonderful pot luck lunch.

A UCW Christmas gathering with some exceptional entertainment.

And they don't call it the Loonie Sock coffee morning for nothing!

Peeling potatoes for the church's annual turkey dinner.

And ready to serve!

Celebrating our church staff ...

And part of this wonderful congregation and family to which we belong.

A faith community, like our congregation here at St. Andrew's, whatever else it may do, or wish to do, has the basic job of helping people realize that we are all connected to God. We are all part of God's family, all included in the prayer of Jesus that we might be one with each other, and that his joy may be in us, and our joy may be full. Today Jesus prays that we might be one in him, blessed by the life we enjoy in community as the church –sharing each other's hopes and burdens, seeking God's love as our guide, creating a world where gifts of courage, generosity, kindness, and love are shared so that all have enough for full human life. May it be so. Amen.

