

Building Stronger Families: 3. Someone to Love

Mark 3:31-35

June 30, 2019

Pastor Steve Richards

When I think of family, I invariably think of the ways that television has presented the family? The first television family that I remember were the Cleavers, Ward and June and their children Wally and the Beaver. It was told from the perspective of eight year old Beaver who was always getting into some sort of trouble. If you are old enough to remember the show, Ward always came home from work wearing a white shirt and tie which he wore until bedtime and June was always in a dress, her hair perfectly coifed. They didn't look anything like my parents. Never said anything harsh, never seemed to get angry, always slept in twin beds – what was that about?

As I said last week, the first show my children remember was the Cosby Show. Now both parents were working. Cliff Huxable, an obstetrician, and Claire, an attorney, and yet they both always seemed to be around the house. The dad always had the right thing to say with just the right humor. Or maybe for you, it was the Simpsons. They are about as dysfunctional as a family can be and yet Homer's love for Marge is always rock solid. Today's most popular family sitcom is Modern Family. It is focused on how to love each other within the greater complexity of relationships. The nature of family has become a whole lot more complex, and today a lot of us turn to people we are not even related to and that's where we find family.

What is your definition of family? The basic social unit of parents and their children; Or maybe for you it is this definition: like-minded people pursuing common values. You don't need to be married or to have children to want that. When our daughter, Bethany was in middle school we moved several times. In the course of four years, she attended five different schools. I now realize just how hard that really was. When we moved here to Plymouth, she started ninth grade. I remember the first time we drove over the bridge to Wayzata High School, and it was "whoa"! Not knowing anyone, it was intimidating, and every day after school I would ask if she made a friend – because she wanted a relationship. We wanted to belong. And I would say: to have a friend, be a friend. Doesn't that sound like something a parent would say? And I don't think she found my words any more comforting than I would have. But we all want, we all need relationships. But relationships are hard.

As I said last Sunday, turn to the Bible and we don't find stories of the perfect families. There's Adam and Eve who get in trouble almost from the beginning and they have two sons, Cain and Abel who don't get along. They don't just fight with each other - Cain kills Abel. Then Lamech comes along and introduces polygamy. Abraham lies and says his wife is really his sister in order to save his own skin – not once but twice. Then his son Isaac marries Rebekah and they spend their lives playing favorites with their two sons. Jacob with the help of his mom deceives dad, cheats his brother and his brother spends years trying to kill Jacob. Then Jacob favors one son, Joseph so much that Joseph's older brothers want to kill him. They end up selling him into slavery, lying about it, and covering it up for years. Are you starting to feel better about your family? These families are like Jerry Springer material – and that's just the first book of the Bible.

One reason I find the Bible so believable is that this stuff wasn't taken out. Think about it – if we were putting the Bible together, we'd take this stuff out and include only the perfect people, the perfect families – and instead of a Bible, we'd have a pamphlet, a brochure maybe. The Bible is

saying relationships are hard. But through these dysfunctional, messed up families, God is somehow present and working to keep the dream of redemption alive.

This church is not the place where successful families, families that have-it-all-together come and congratulate each other for how well they are doing. That's what some people think – because I often come across people who stay away because in their brokenness they no longer feel like they belong. I've said before, we clean up well – perhaps too well – and it can be hard for someone to walk in here and see there is not a perfect family among us. This is the place for people in broken families to come and find love and forgiveness and discover what God can do.

The family is important. God created us to be in families. We cannot survive on our own. Last Sunday we celebrated a late Father's Day and I realized it was the first time since 2006 that all four of us had been together for Father's Day. Until recently, one child lived on the east coast and the other on the west coast. Many of you are part of families who are scattered across the country and even around the world. But in Jesus' world, the extended family was often living in the same house. They would work together and live together, sharing everything. It was part of the God-given fabric of life. But suddenly in Mark chapter three, Jesus challenges what had been the heart of Jewish family identity. Jesus' mother clearly did not understand what her son was up to. Jesus was living in Capernaum and she and the rest of the family was back in Nazareth, thirty miles away. Mark tells us: **When his family heard what was happening, they came to take control of him. They were saying, “He’s out of his mind!”** So one day, she brought her family from Nazareth up to Capernaum to find Jesus and take him home. Living so far was scandalous – just imagine what people must be saying about her dysfunctional family. And when they got to Capernaum, Jesus confirmed their worst fear. He slammed the door on their whole understanding of what it meant to be the perfect family.

A mom, a dad, 2.4 children with a dog and a cat? Is that what makes a family? In the 1990s, I was doing children's ministry. Every year an elementary school in Richfield asked me to come and talk to all the second grade classes about family. I would begin by showing pictures of families – all kinds of configurations of families, some with moms and dads and some single parent families, multigenerational families, different ethnicities within the same family and if I didn't hold up a picture of their family, I would ask the child to describe his or her own family and together we decided that if all it took was people living at the same address maybe that was not enough to define family. And so we did several activities to look at certain virtues that seemed essential to being family.

Jesus had gone to Capernaum with a mission that involved breaking traditional understandings and starting a new kind of family. So when Jesus is told, "**Your mother, brothers, and sisters are outside looking for you.**" What he say? "**Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?**" **Looking around at those seated around him in a circle, he said...** "It's you! You are my family." Relationships are hard. This isn't meant to be easy. Who is welcome here? Is it only those who agree on politics? Is it only those who agree on the Bible? Is it only those who are fine upstanding citizens? Those who look like me, act like me, talk like me, dress like me, drive cars like me, and behave like me? Who is the last person you would want to spend time with? And what if that person walked in and sat down next to you? Who are my mother and brothers? It's you – and they thought Jesus was out of his mind, filled with demonic spirits. But Jesus has the mind of God.

God is determined to have a family, but to join a new family, you must detach from your old understanding. Remember how he called to Simon and Andrew who were fishermen casting a net into the lake. Jesus said, "follow me." Then he called to James and John who were also

fishing and without delay they left their family. Then there was another time when a man said, "I'll follow you, only first let me go give my recently deceased father a decent burial" – and remember what Jesus said? "Let the dead bury the dead. Let someone else do the funeral. You follow me. It's not that Jesus devalues family, I think he is saying your family is too small.

This morning we baptize a child, and in effect here's what I am saying to the parents of that child: "You are wonderful people, but you don't know enough and you are not skilled enough to raise a Christian. Therefore, we will adopt your child. We'll take responsibility. We will help you raise a Christian, because we are your family!"

Are you with me, this morning? You need a bigger family. And here in this place, you are born again into a new family as large as the love of God in Jesus Christ. What's it mean to be part of this family? There's somebody to love – always, always somebody to love.

Years ago, I took a summer course in family ministry. The instructor told about going to her church one Sunday morning. It was a communion Sunday. She was single and came alone. That morning she sat all by her herself. When the time came for communion, the pastor suggested that people walk forward with their families and take communion together. But she didn't have any family, and suddenly she felt so out of place that she began looking for a way to leave. But there were two children seated behind her. One of them tapped her on the shoulder and said, "Can we be your family?" This week, there's somebody to love – maybe the one who is hard to love, the one you've been ignoring or maybe the stranger who walks walk into your life because God wants a bigger family.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of June 30, 2019

Weekly Prayer: Lord God, you created each of us and placed us within families. Sometimes it is the people in our families who are the hardest for us to love and respect. Unite us, Lord, in spite of our differences. Help us to be persons of love and encouragement, ever mindful of each person's special place in your kingdom. Draw us ever closer to you in this great Christian family, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Monday, July 1

Scripture: Genesis 5:1-2; 1 Timothy 5:8

This is the record of Adam's descendants. On the day God created humanity, he made them to resemble God and created them male and female. He blessed them and called them humanity on the day they were created.

But if someone doesn't provide for their own family, and especially for a member of their household, they have denied the faith. They are worse than those who have no faith.

Observation: Genesis is a book about families, and what is clear from the book of Genesis as well as your own family is that family life can be hard. But God created family to be the cradle of life and love. God takes your relationships in your family very seriously. The problem is that it's easy to take family members for granted and also neglect to nurture and care for those relationships. When those relationships fall apart it is devastating. Family makes a huge difference in who you are, for better or worse. The goal is to make sure you are doing everything you can to make family relationships healthy and whole. Family matters to God.

Application: Is your extended family an integral part of your life or just distant relatives? Why do you think that is? How do you think your own family background has influenced who you are and how you have lived including raising your own family?

Prayer: Thank you, God, for those relationships that are life-giving. Often I find that in my family of origin, but it is easy for me to take those relationships for granted. Help me to nurture and show love to the people around me. Amen.

Tuesday, July 2

Scripture: Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Train children in the way they should go; when they grow old, they won't depart from it.

Israel, listen! Our God is the LORD! Only the LORD! Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength. These words that I am commanding you today must always be on your minds. Recite them to your children. Talk about them when you are sitting around your house and when you are out and about, when you are lying down and when you are getting up. Tie them on your hand as a sign. They should be on your forehead as a symbol. Write them on your house's doorframes and on your city's gates.

Observation: As a part of family, there is nothing more important than parenting. Even when children become adults, parents never stop being an influence in their lives. According to Scripture, nothing is more important or a calling higher than being a parent. The seeds of faith that you plant and impress on your children are vital to their spiritual lives both now and in the future. The good news is that you are not alone. God created you to do this and will help you succeed. The legacy you will leave will influence not only the next generation but also many generations to come. No matter how old your children are or get, they will look for Jesus in you, which will shape their picture of who God is.

Application: "If it seems wrong in your opinion to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve. Choose the gods whom your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But my family and I will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15) What do Joshua's words mean to you today? Name some of the ways you have and are currently imprinting your faith and relationship with Jesus into your children or grandchildren? What kind of legacy are you leaving for the generations that follow you?

Prayer: Lord, you know that I did not get to where I am all by myself. I am grateful for the people in my life who helped to shape the person that I am today. I want to be a positive, faith-filled person in the lives of the next generation. Help me to see how I can do that each day. Amen.

Wednesday, July 3

Scripture: Mark 3:31-35

His mother and brothers arrived. They stood outside and sent word to him, calling for him. A crowd was seated around him, and those sent to him said, "Look, your mother, brothers, and sisters are outside looking for you." He replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Looking around at those seated around him in a circle, he said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother, sister, and mother."

Observation: Don't forget about your "extended family" which, according to Scripture, is all brothers and sisters around you. There is a desperate need for better pictures of what families should be and were created to be by God. And you can be a part of a surrogate family who comes alongside to help them see what family is supposed to be. You could invite someone into your Faith Group who is away from family and in need of that kind of support. Regardless, there are whole communities of people who desperately need somebody to love and for somebody to love them.

Application: Is there a broken relationship with a family member that God is prompting you to begin reaching out and repairing? What will be your first step? Who has been a surrogate family to you in your life and what did they do? How can you reach out with both your family and your Faith Group?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you showed that the essential quality of family is love, and where love – an unconditional kind of love – exists, that's where we find family. So let my actions and interactions be grounded in love. Help me to be ready to extend that love to persons who have not experienced that. Amen.

Thursday, July 4

Scripture: Mark 2:1-12

After a few days, Jesus went back to Capernaum, and people heard that he was at home. So many gathered that there was no longer space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven!" Some legal experts were sitting there, muttering among themselves, "Why does he speak this way? He's insulting God. Only the one God can forgive sins." Jesus immediately recognized what they were discussing, and he said to them, "Why do you fill your minds with these questions? Which is easier—to say to a paralyzed person, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take up your bed, and walk'? But so you will know that the Human One has authority on the earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed, "Get up, take your mat, and go home." Jesus raised him up, and right away he picked up his mat and walked out in front of everybody. They were all amazed and praised God, saying, "We've never seen anything like this!"

Observation: This incident so awed Jesus' followers that the first three gospels all tell the story nearly word for word. The man in the story badly needed healing. By himself, however, he wasn't going to be able to get near Jesus. With effort and ingenuity, his friends brought him into Jesus' presence. Jesus healed him inwardly even before he restored his ability to walk.

Application: Have you ever been mentally, emotionally or physically paralyzed, and had people who cared about you carry you through the situation? Have you ever been part of carrying someone you cared about through a crisis? In either case, what did it take to "dig through the roof" to meet the other person's need?

Prayer: Use me, O God, to reach and respond to someone who is hurting today. Let me be a "stretcher-bearer" who will do whatever is necessary to show compassion. As you have loved me, so may I love another. Amen.

Friday, July 5

Scripture: Romans 12:9-21

Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good. Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other. Don't hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord! Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you're in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer. Contribute to the needs of God's people, and welcome strangers into your home. Bless people who harass you—bless and don't curse them. Be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying. Consider everyone as equal, and don't think that you're better than anyone else. Instead, associate with people who have no status. Don't think that you're so smart. Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good. If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people. Don't try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. It is written, Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back, says the Lord. Instead, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. By doing this, you will pile burning coals of fire upon his head. Don't be defeated by evil, but defeat evil with good.

Observation: Today's Scripture twice uses a term that sounds so ordinary we might miss the fact that it's a key New Testament idea: "one another." God did not call Christians to a solo journey through the hostile Roman world. They were a community, strengthened in their power to "overcome evil with good" by their steady, loving commitment to one another.

Application: "Hurt people hurt people" is sadly true. Jesus came to offer a new way of "being" with one another, which Paul summed up as "Do not repay anyone evil for evil." Jesus "overcame evil with good." What is your experience of living this way?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you walked among us as genuine love incarnate. Help me understand love in ways beyond the sentimentalism my culture often confuses with love. Let your love be a robust force making every life I touch better. Amen.

Saturday, July 6

Scripture: Colossians 3:12-17

Therefore, as God's choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful people. The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him.

Observation: Being a group or church "member" can feel like "paper work." My name goes on a list. I agree to certain things and receive news and notices. Colossians didn't say we are "members of an organization," but "members of one body." The image suggests that Jesus connects us to each other organically, as a leg or arm is joined to our body.

Application: Today's verses are about what it means to be "holy." What kind of person does the word "holy" bring to your mind? How do "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and

patience" enrich your sense of what it means for you to be holy? In what ways is the close connection of Christians to each other vital for living truly holy lives?

Prayer: Loving God, how grateful I am to know that you are part of my life, with me in every step that I take. Let your love for me shape me into the kind of person whose essential character is compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Please continue your work in me. Amen.