

Family Reunion

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. ‘What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith. (Mark 6:1-6)

Family reunion. What comes to your mind when you hear those words? Perhaps you see family members you haven't seen for years. Maybe you hear the sound of friendly conversation and children playing. Or, maybe you smell freshly-grilled burgers and recall the taste of homemade lemonade. Then again, maybe you try not to see that “crazy aunt” who loves to argue about politics. Or you dread the sound of your own children caught fighting in front of your mother. And just what should you say to your brother who hasn't belonged to a church for years now? Or to your nephew who is experimenting with an “alternative lifestyle”? How can you show love to your family without causing even more problems?

Jesus had unpleasant “family reunions” in his lifetime. Mark recorded one of those experiences in our reading for this devotion. Jesus was in his hometown of Nazareth. It was the Sabbath. He entered the synagogue and began to teach. Mark doesn't tell us what Jesus said on that day. But if the message was anything like that of a previous visit to Nazareth's synagogue (Luke 4:16-21), it would have centered in Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world. Jesus would have told the assembly, which most likely would have included his own brothers and sisters, that he was the one they had been waiting for, the Messiah. But how could the boy they watched grow to adulthood, to be a carpenter, be the one to save them? Impossible! They would not believe it. As Jesus heard their words and saw their hearts, he was amazed at their lack of faith.

Luke records that in Jesus' earlier visit to Nazareth the people even tried to kill him by throwing him off a cliff-(Luke 4:28-30)! Jesus' own brothers (“half-brothers,” really, the sons of Mary and Joseph) called him crazy and interfered with his ministry (Mark 3:21). Jesus knew the pain of not being able to enjoy spiritual fellowship with his family and announced that his *true* family consists of all who believe in him (Luke 8:21). Even at his death, most of Jesus' family did not believe his message.

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to one [we are not told he was the oldest, though he probably was] of his brothers, James. James became a believer, and even became the leader of the Christians in Jerusalem! Apparently his other brothers got the message, too, for we find them praying and sharing in the ministry with the disciples after Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:14). It had taken longer than one lifetime, but the Holy Spirit had used Jesus' ministry to his family to bring them to faith.

So, what do you do when your "crazy aunt" corners you? What do you say to your spiritually lost brother? Jesus has called you to speak the truth in love to all people, especially to your family. While the opportunity to share God's Word with our families is a great blessing, it also may be our biggest challenge. After all, these people raised us, were raised with us, or were raised by us. Who better knows our faults and weaknesses? God knows we will be tempted to think we are not fit to share his message. He knows we will be discouraged when family members reject us and his Word.

But do not be dismayed if you do not see results. God simply says to share the gospel. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God can bring members of your family to faith so you may enjoy a grand "family reunion" with them and all believers in heaven.

Prayer:

Jesus, my true brother, be with me as I share your love with my family. Give me strength and courage to continue my ministry even when I feel rejected. Please, especially be with _____, who is struggling in the faith. May we be together with you in heaven someday! Amen.

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