

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
COMPASS, PA

June 6, 2021 – PENTECOST 2 / PROPER 5, YR. B

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*Finding a New Family—in Christ*”

Genesis 3:8-15	(The first couple are tempted by Satan to become like God)
Psalms 130	(A cry to God for His mercy and redemption)
2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1	(We do not lose heart, because of the promised resurrection)
St. Mark 3:20-35	(Jesus teaches that those who do God's will are His family)

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Family. We can't choose the one we're born into, and we all come from one. Some families are loving, some are quirky, some are dysfunctional, some are controlling, and many are some combination of those things. No matter what type of family we're stuck with, we each have a role to play within it: the Peacemaker, the Pretty One, the Black Sheep, the Smart One, the Religious One, the Pampered Baby, and so on. But what happens when the Black Sheep starts acting like the Smart One? Or the Peacemaker tries to be the Pampered Baby?

The delicate system of roles is disturbed, and each player wants to put the other players back into their designated boxes. Members often try to sabotage the fledgling before anything becomes permanent. Take any self-improvement endeavor—losing weight, quitting smoking, going back to school, seeing a counselor. Some family members will discourage this because it makes them look at the improvements they need to make but aren't.\*

They fear change in their own lives, so why should they support the changes in yours? It takes a strong person to become who God created us to be and to continue to make positive changes when it may put our personal relationships in jeopardy.

Look at Jesus coming back to His hometown where His family lived. People were crowding around Him to see if He would heal them, but some were saying, “He's out of his mind,” and “He has Beelzebul [the devil], and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” They feared what they did not understand, and so Jesus' own family tried to restrain Him. *They* weren't too sure about His mental stability either, and may have been embarrassed by all the attention He was attracting.

But Jesus doesn't shrink back, or turn around and follow His family home. He faces the crowd with calm confidence, because He has been called by God to preach and teach and heal—and this was His sole focus. He knew His role, but it wasn't necessarily the one His family or hometown thought He should have.

Moreover, God was doing a new thing in Jesus. God was expanding what it means to be bonded to another person the way we are in a family, and Jesus called attention to this, when He declared: “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” This certainly challenged the Jewish culture around Him. No longer are you close to God because you were born into a Jewish household; no longer do you just take care of your own kind; instead, your family extends to *anyone* who does the will of God—whether or not they are anything like you.

Today, Jesus' bold declaration, which no doubt made His mother and siblings uncomfortable, if only temporarily, challenges *us* to look beyond *our* family boundaries, our denominational demarcations, and our ethnic, racial, or socio-economic status, to see that we have brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, who are doing God's will, even if it is in a way that is different from our preconceptions and expectations. Still today, our Lord calls us to broaden our definition of family in ways that are as shocking as they were to Saint Mark's first-century audience.

But we should not be surprised by these kinds of unconventional moves from God. He knows we need to be deeply anchored in the family of God, because, after all, how successful are we when left to our own devices? In today's Old Testament lesson from Genesis, we catch up with the first couple. Adam and Eve thought they were doing pretty well on their own until their pride allowed them to be tricked by Satan—and then their fall from grace and innocence ruined the rest of history for everyone else.

However, before we condemn them too much, we, too, tend to rebel against what we know God has commanded. We want to be “normal” like other people, so we start measuring our lives by earthly standards. We lose our focus and stop doing the will of God. Brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, turn against one another.

We forget that we have value and purpose simply because God loves us unconditionally and eternally. Jesus understood this. He kept His focus on following God's will and was clear about it, despite what His family, the crowds, or the Religious Authorities demanded of Him. Of course, resisting this kind of pressure is easier said than done.

The late Anthony de Mello, a Jesuit priest, psychotherapist, and spiritual writer, told a story about a man who traversed land and sea to check out for himself a Master's extraordinary fame. “What miracles has your Master worked?” he asked one of his disciples. “Well, there are miracles and miracles,” he responded. “In your country, it is regarded as a miracle if God does someone's will. In our land, it is regarded as a miracle if someone does God's will.” We may smile at the story, but it speaks truth. Doing the will of God often means leaving our comfort zones, even as Jesus did.

As Episcopalians, our Baptismal Covenant promotes a life that follows God by continuing in the apostles' teaching and fellowship; in the breaking of bread; in the prayers; resisting evil; repenting and returning to the Lord; proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; seeking and serving Christ in all persons; loving our neighbor as ourselves; striving for justice and peace among all people; and respecting the dignity of every human being. This is not an easy road to travel! That is why we profess each of our Baptismal vows with the response: “I will, *with God's help*.” We can't do this alone. Jesus' single-minded focus on God's will is an example for us. Like Him, we must have God's help to follow His call and become the people He created us to be.

Reflecting on these biblical truths, may we go forth, with the words of St. Clare of Assisi's blessing, to: “Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you as a mother. Go in peace to follow the good road, and may God's blessing be with you always.” *Amen*.

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\*Inspired by Danae M. Ashley, “God calls us to expand our family,” 10 June 2012, [SermonsThatWork](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/god-calls-us-to-expand-our-family-proper-5-b-2012/) <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/god-calls-us-to-expand-our-family-proper-5-b-2012/> 28 May 2021. Used with permission.