
Joining the Body of Christ

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 9 June 2024

Genesis 1:26-31 • 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 • Mark 3:20-35



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

We gather every week as God's people, as the Body of Christ, as a single Communion. In this we join with Christians around the world, near and far, of whatever denomination. All those who put their faith in Jesus are our brothers and sisters, one with us in the family of God.

Today we are welcoming two new members of that family, and we give thanks for their commitment to walk in the light of Christ, and to be part of the family as well. Truly this is a special occasion and a joyful one.

Our Gospel passage today talks about family. On first reading, it may be a little confusing. What does Jesus mean by apparently shunning his mother and his brothers, keeping them standing outside and not going out to them? It seems that Jesus is denying their relationship, the very woman who gave birth to him and his own siblings, blood relations. And remember, this is in ancient Israel,

where if you had no family, you were nothing. Everything depended on your relations: who your father was, who your ancestors were. Notice in the Bible that people are referred to as “so-and-so son of so-and-so.” Honouring your father and mother is one of the Ten Commandments. And yet Jesus says, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” as if they were nothing to him.

We must remember, first, that Jesus sometimes used exaggeration when trying to make a point. In his Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, he tells of a servant who owes the king ten thousand talents, an enormous sum — equivalent to millions of dollars. Clearly, the man could not have amassed such a debt; but the point is that whatever he owes, it is too much for him to pay back. Again, and more directly related to today’s Gospel, Jesus once said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). Jesus does not want us to hate our family, for that would go against his second greatest commandment, of loving our fellow humans. What he means is that we must put God first, and love God more than anything else. It is the same in today’s example. Jesus would never turn away or ignore his mother and brothers; but he wants to impress on the disciples that the family you are born into — the ordinary human family — is not as important as your brothers and sisters in faith. God’s family is what is most important.

God’s family is what we are when we gather here in church and sing praises to God through Christ. It is what we are when we pray together, and especially when we celebrate Communion together and share the same bread and the same wine. It is not a loss of family, but a gain — a tremendous growth in love and fellowship. As part of God’s family, we have brothers and sisters all over the world. When we pray, any time of the day or night, we know that millions of others around the globe are praying at the same time, and God is hearing all our prayers. When we pray the Lord’s Prayer together, we are saying words which billions of people, far more than the population of any one country, know and love. At any given moment, there is always a tremendous outpouring of love and prayer which we here in this parish are a part of.

It is God’s plan that all peoples should someday come together as one, and it will happen. It is what the Church is for, and what we should continually pray for, that all people should come to God in Jesus Christ and celebrate as one body.

Before I came into ordained ministry, I used to work for a computer company in California, in that area known as Silicon Valley. I worked for some years in the Latin America Finance Group. We had responsibility for revenue forecasting and sales support for our offices in Mexico and South America. There were six main offices, in Mexico City, Bogota, Caracas, Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, and

Santiago. I was in the headquarters team, and I was in regular contact with my colleagues in all these field offices. We had regular conference calls with them, and of course had to be cognisant of the different time zones, from California to six hours later in Brazil. This meant that although we were all in different places and at different times during our work days, we were all discussing the same issues. I think of the Church in that same way. It's always morning somewhere, and always evening somewhere, and whenever I choose to pray, many others are praying with me.

Our connection is more than temporal, of course. I believe that any gain in faith, any new understanding of God any of us comes to, benefits all of us. Our connection is not just physical, as when we stand shoulder to shoulder (or kneel shoulder to shoulder) at the Communion rail to receive the body and blood. We have a spiritual connection through the Holy Spirit, that gift we receive upon our baptism. John Donne's line, "Any man's death diminishes me," is well known, and expresses this connection. He also wrote, in the same piece:

[A]ll that [the Church] does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that head which is my head too, and ingrafted into that body whereof I am a member.

It is a tremendous thing to be so connected to each other. We are a family — the family of God. Granted, like any family, we don't always get along as we should; that can easily be seen in recent events concerning the churches of the world. But the connection is real and should be appreciated for what it is: the gift of Christ to humankind.

So as we celebrate the blessing of baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit, let us give thanks for the body we are part of: the Body of Christ our Lord. Amen.