

FAMILY VALUES

September 5, 2010, 23 Ord C
Highlands Presbyterian Church

Jeremiah 18:1-6, Philemon 1-23
Rev. Judy Hoffhine

Families come in all shapes and sizes. There are families of origin and families of choice, and the one in between – families of adoption. Families of origin are those connected by blood ties – parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and so on. These deeply rooted relationships are complicated and cannot be divorced or severed completely because of those genes tie us together. We rejoice and wrestle in them. Through them we can learn love, loyalty and perseverance. They also can cause more hurt and sense of abandonment than any others.

An adoptive family is much like a family of origin, but includes birth parents and siblings and adoptive parents and siblings. My nuclear family is such a family. When I was nine years old, my parents adopted my sister. She has found her birth parents and one sibling, and still affirmed her membership in our family as we supported and loved her as she sought these roots. Her search has been a spiritual experience for her.

Families of choice are those closely knit circles we choose – a family of friends with whom we have much in common and love to spend time. These are more fluid – we can come and go as we move and grow. These can hang tough together and require attention and care like any other family.

In the midst of these circles circulate values. Values are taught and learned, chosen and adopted, tried and released or affirmed. Values, that slippery word, refers to the code of ethics, the structure, upon which we build our lives. They can be bad or good depending on your viewpoint. We think of them as good, but some families have terrible values. We might say they have no values, but they do have values that we don't recognize. We like to be with people who share our values, not with those who ridicule them. We tolerate those who have different values – sometimes. Read *The Glass Castle*.

The little red hen had a strong work ethic. She did not like those around her who were lazy and would not help her make bread. She particularly resented them when they wanted to eat the finished product but hadn't lifted a finger in the preparation. Different values. Do you suppose that barnyard family was happy together?

The apostle Paul, sitting in prison, met another prisoner who had been a family slave to Philemon. He ran away. Onesimus, through his friendship with Paul, learned about Jesus Christ, and the hope and new life he offered. Paul and Onesimus chose to become as father/son and brothers, united by a common Parent, God, who brought them together. Paul writes to his friend Philemon to tell him that Onesimus is coming back to this family, NOT as a criminal, NOT as a slave, NOT as a youngster, but as a brother, one whom they can love and trust.

Take a look at the values being broadcast here. Remember, values are values...they can be good, bad or indifferent depending on your values. Onesimus, in prison as a runaway slave, was deemed useless to society, and now has been given the map to a new life. Paul and he have had time to discuss his options. Thanks to Paul's contacts, they are all a family united by Christ. Onesimus can be nurtured and raised from spiritual infancy into spiritual maturity. Good family values: love, productivity, kindness, perseverance, commitment, and a chance for a

new start. Onesimus chose the new life over the old life, and it was a good choice for him. We can only pray that Philemon did the same for him.

We are called to structure our lives upon Christ's values. These can be found in Jesus' great commandments, in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, and in Jesus' life. The upsetting thing about these values is that they turn our lives upside down. Just when we think we have it right, we don't. The Samaritan, not the pious priest, chose the Christian value. In our system of value judgments, Jesus should have been with his family when he was twelve, not off at the temple without their knowledge. I would have gotten that one wrong myself! He should have obeyed the law on the Sabbath; he should have paid attention to the rich people who paid the rabbis; he should have married and had children and raised them in the way of the Torah; he should have..., he should have,... but he didn't! He cracked open a whole new set of values: bold and upsetting values that seemed to tear down as much as build up.

I think Jesus would say that family is important, but not as important as God. He would agree that it takes a village to raise a child: his village, God's community. He would say that only when a child walks in the way of God will he or she have whole life. That is why we baptize children into the whole church. We are all part of that child's or adult's family – not just by their or our choice, but by God's choice.

That is the family I have left out – God's family by God's choice. When we become part of that family, our focus and energy turn there. As Jeremiah said, God is like the potter reshaping our lives to his liking. We are broken in order to be made whole, and it's painful. Our values are turned upside down, and that is the cross we bear and the cup we drink. If you feel confused or overwhelmed trying to live by Christ's values, it is no wonder. They contradict society's values. We need each other, prayer and study to know and follow his values. Knowing Christ's teachings is one-third of our faith statement: knowing Christ's teachings, growing in faith, showing God's love.

We come to church each Sunday to hear this news, knowing that we will fall as we carry his cross. Yet, we still come. God's values make sense to us, because God pulls us toward them and we keep learning and wrestling with them. Each week we try once again to carry his cross, to be like Onesimus who finds a new way into the world. We devote ourselves to the values of our family in Christ. Amen.