

22 Pentecost
November 9, 2025
2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17
Luke 20:27-38

The question of family has been on my mind a lot recently, on a personal and professional level. Many of you know that Mike and I have lost three close family members in the space of thirteen months, with all that that entails: cleaning out apartments, going through family memories, feeling a little uneasy at being one step closer to our own eventual fate. As a diocese we are also preparing for a big family change, with the election this weekend of a new Bishop, the Rev. Dr. Antonio Gallardo of our sister congregation, St. Luke's/San Lucas, Long Beach who is likely to steer the course of the diocese for a couple of decades. How will that affect our lives, individually, spiritually, and as a community, in this place and time? And with all the news about the election of the Right Reverend and Right Honorable Sarah Mullally as the new Archbishop of Canterbury, and the predictable fury from the more conservative parts of the Anglican Communion, I wonder what the Communion will look like in months and years to come. Will we continue to be a fully global communion? Or will we fracture over the question of whether we really believe that we are all made in God's image and worthy of equal love, respect, and caring, or whether some of us will continue to be seen as second-class citizens, despite Jesus' teachings to the contrary.

Thinking about family also made me wonder much more strongly that I might otherwise have what the woman in today's Gospel lesson thought about her family situation. Was she continually devastated by the loss of each husband in turn? Was she glad to be taken in by all these brothers, glad that they kept giving her a home when the other option for a childless widow was to become a beggar on the street? Did she get tired of being passed from brother to brother to fulfill the law, without much regard to her personhood? Did she wonder if there was something more to her life than being the vessel for transmitting the family name? Perhaps these questions, being asked in this particular time and place, might not have occurred to that woman in that particular society; but I still wonder, people being people, if "fulfilling the law" also meant palpable family caring and not just a place by the fire given in fulfillment of duty.

Nothing about family and family change is abstract when you're the person in question, is it? There used to be a saying going around – maybe it's still out there – that "Family is where, when you go there, they have to take you in." That may be true... but in some cases, it may also be cold comfort. "Having to be taken in" says

nothing about being wanted, being cared for, being supported through whatever is going on. Family needs to be more than walls and a roof, more than a meal served while silently calculating whether there's enough to go around. I think that's why there's so much acknowledgement now about the importance of "chosen family," people who are related through caring and support of who one is, rather than genetics... because something radical shifts in society when we see family and all that word implies as a choice made freely and lovingly every day, and not just an accident of birth and place.

Christianity has acknowledged this idea for centuries through the sacrament of baptism, and the Episcopal church especially promotes this idea through our Baptismal Covenant. Every time we renew our Baptismal Covenant, as we did last week, we repeat our vows to be a family not just in name, but through action based in love for each other and for the God who made us and sustains us. We promise to continue breaking bread together, even if we don't all agree on everything. We promise to resist evil when we encounter it, even when the world tries to put a pretty face on it. We promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons, bringing them to the family table even – or especially! – when society turns a blind eye to them. We promise to respect the dignity of every human being, saying that every person we meet is beloved of God, and doing our best to be in good relationship with them if we possibly can. We acknowledge that maybe there are people out there for whom in good conscience we can't make that promise right now, because of abuse or other good and sufficient reason. But Jesus, and our Baptismal Covenant, call us to do everything we can to be sure as few people as possible are seen as commodities rather than persons.

Which brings us back to our Gospel lesson. The Sadducees, who don't believe in the resurrection, are trying to trap Jesus into either looking foolish or saying something contrary to Mosaic law. "Teacher, Moses told us how to handle this situation on earth. But who gets this woman as a prize in the afterlife? Will she have one husband, or will she be shared among all of them?" And Jesus responds by breaking the idea of family – and incidentally, the afterlife – wide open. "Don't expect the afterlife to be exactly the same as this life. God has something bigger in mind, where our identity and relationships are not confined to family, or gender, or ethnicity, or anything else we see as important in the here and now. What will matter in the afterlife is our identity as children of God, all siblings with each other and with those who have gone before us."

That can be hard to wrap our minds around as we sit here on Sunday morning or go about our daily lives. Many, if not most, of us have experienced the ebb and flow of family life, and have first-hand experiences of loss and change and how scary

they are. And loss and change and fear can do one of two things. They can cause us to draw in, retreat, draw the walls and rules more firmly around us so that we have some kind of continuity, something to hold on to. Or they can cause us to open up and expand the boundaries, to lessen our sorrow or our need by making sure there isn't someone else in the same situation who's left to go it alone.

Obviously, we're never going to have complete connection with everyone in this world. But I think that's what we're called to try for, as members of the Episcopal branch of what former Presiding Bishop Curry called "the Jesus movement": to spend as much of our life as we can practicing connection and relationship on as deep and spiritual a level as possible, so that the kind of connection and unity we find in the hereafter is less of a shock. If, as theologian Nancy Lynne Westfield writes, "The mystery of the resurrection revealed by Jesus is that Heaven is a place where those who have been dehumanized will be restored; those who have been oppressed will be set free; those who have been treated as inferior will be raised up and called beloved," (1) then prayerful logic says to me that "creating the kin-dom of God in this place" means doing our best to lessen oppression, inhumanity, and "othering" now, and not just in the world to come. In this morning's epistle, Paul calls us the "first fruits for salvation," and that says to me that we need to be working to make sure we're not the last fruits, but rather are constantly striving to expand the definition of family so that we truly see people as God made them to be, not what we want them to be.

As I prepare to leave St. Gregory's for my next interim posting, I want to thank you all for being chosen family, and for continuing to welcome me when I've returned for a spell. It's hard for me to fathom that I've been part of this community in one way or another for nearly forty years. I truly appreciate that you all do your best to welcome the stranger, uphold relationships, and make St. Gregory's a place where love of God and neighbor aren't just words on a page, but elements of life. I am grateful to have had this time with you, and I will carry you all with me as I go to serve another section of this big diocesan family. May we continue to enjoy and nurture the ties that bind us together as beloved siblings in Christ, and may all that we do always be done in love.

Amen.

1. Nancy Lynne Westfield, "Pastoral Perspective on Luke 20:27-38," in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 4, pp.284-288.