

# *“Community”*

*Third Sunday after Pentecost*  
*Mark 3:20-35*

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From the Pulpit

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*Prayer for Illumination:* Holy God, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, may these words rest in the souls of all who gather in your name. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Salvation. Amen.

*You can learn a lot about family* – attending a family reunion. When you grow up in a small family – a family reunion can look much like an intimate dinner. But in a larger family – a week long family reunion starts to take on a life of its own. You can overload on potlucks; having to proclaim your loyalty choosing Aunt Jean’s hash brown casserole or Auntie Anne’s Tater Tot surprise.

When you only see one another at family reunions, you watch the second cousins play in the pool like old friends. You see teenagersglom together as a pack listening to music and going to the beach. You see exhausted parents take a well-deserved afternoon nap while others watch the kids. You observe grandparents sitting on the porch reminiscing about days gone by. You live in the tension that comes when growing families try to share the same small rented house.

We may all have family reunion stories to share. Joining together as family for these events can generate laughter and good memories. But they are not always easy, especially when

another's opinion makes you feel less that welcomed, or when you are always the person taking the family photo and never getting in it. Family Reunions can be hard.

Let's face it – families are hard.

Some of us don't feel particularly connected to our own families. There are things in our lives that drive us away. We are annoyed with what someone did or said. We don't feel accepted for the people we are. We are hurt or left completely broken when someone we love walks out. Family is hard to talk about. Sometimes we would rather talk about anything else OTHER THAN OUR FAMILIES. Some of us seek out other friends or companions who are more like "family" than our own. Family, to you, might not be an official relative at all, but someone you can rely on, confide in, and trust.

For some of us, family forms when church members work with one another to meet our brothers and sisters in Christ. Preparing and taking a meal for a family. Giving a ride to another for Sunday service or to a medical appointment.

For the last week, eleven of us spent time together, working in West Franklinton as part of the Gladden Community House Senior Referral Program. We scraped paint, power washed garages and basements, and pulled weeds (lots of weeds). We met neighborhood children who wondered what we were

doing. We heard the stories of the homeowners, some of whom have been residents of Franklinton for over 43 years. On a rainy Tuesday, we were welcomed to the Gladden Food Pantry to help shoppers with their selections and to help them to their cars. With Clorox wipes in hand, rags and some elbow grease, we wiped down every surface of the pantry from the entrance to the exit. We spent time hearing the stories of the employees and heard about the impact they make in community. When a man and his brother walked up in the rain, pulling their empty wagon, we barely knew what to say when they were instructed to come back the next day.

*You can learn a lot about family* by traveling together. When you spend time with your church family – you get to know them in a deeper way – you make connections that are rooted in something bigger than yourself. When the youth and mentors ride down Broad Street every day from the Eastside to the Westside you learn a lot about each person. You learn that some in the car think that Beyoncé is the best female artist of all time. You also learn not everyone loves Hip Hop. They learn that that Hip Hop Radio station is (newsflash) already programmed in to my radio! You learn that other faithful people from this congregation give their time to bring us lunches and dinners and stay to listen what we did and what

God is up to in our lives and in the lives of the people we encounter.

*You can learn a lot about family* by following Jesus. Today's text begins with family. Family units were the cornerstone of first-century Jewish society. A family not only live together in ancient Israel, they work together and pool their resources. Jesus' family is part of this story, but there's no mention of their names, no other details! By the time his family arrives, Jesus had already gathered others around him so that his own family was left outside. They are too far away for Jesus to hear them call, and in the days before text messages, they send a message from person to person to reach to him.

*When it comes to family – Jesus has a whole new take on relationships.* Jesus' whole life-story from the very beginning creates a different kind of family. Later, on his travels through Galilee, Jesus found a family of fisherman, Simon and Andrew, and later James and John and he asks them to follow him. They drop their nets and they follow. Little did they know they would become a part of a radically new family? Soon others would join them.

There is a new kind of family forming around Jesus. People from all over the region and from all kinds of backgrounds start to follow him. Jesus, knowing his own family is outside, doesn't respond to the crowd, "Oh, it's ok, they are with me... let them in." Instead, he turns to those who are closest to him and says, "Here they are! Here is my family!"

Jesus does not disown his immediate family, nor does he say he did not value them. Instead he extends the invitation to those who so desperately need to hear it: "you are my family!" Jesus is surrounded by people, who don't feel part of their own family, who don't feel welcome at the table; who don't get to speak up for themselves. The ones close to Jesus, the followers of God, are the ones who hear the promise that they are part of the family. It's the invitation to God's love and into God's family.

Maybe there are some of us today who are desperately waiting to hear Jesus' words for ourselves. We come together to hear the promise — "You are part of my family...part of the bigger family of God. Follow me."

In the early church, people went around claiming others as family, regardless of biology. In the family of the church, water is thicker than blood.

I'm speaking of the waters of baptism. Baptism is the key to understanding this family. In baptism we welcome an individual into the larger family which is Christ's church. The promise of baptism is all children everywhere are part of God's family. True, baptisms are and should be a special occasion for the family of the baptized child or adult. But, this sacrament is not a celebration of home and hearth. Baptism is about this strange family that we call church.

Today in worship we baptized Charlotte Cate. During baptism, our church family makes a promise to her and her family, that we will guide and nurture her with love and prayer and encourage her to follow Christ. We are the adoptive children of God. It's the claim God makes at baptism-that we are welcomed and embraced from the very beginning.

The promise is God loves us and claims us. God embraces all of us as a part of the bigger family of God. Whether there is 1 person in your household or 5 or 65 or 1005 in a worshipping community, Jesus' words remind us, we are part of God's much, much bigger family.

*You can learn a lot about God's family by getting busy in it-being a part of it-getting your hands dirty-stepping out of your own comfort zone into the bigger family of God.*

This past week, we experienced holy encounters. Encounters of God's expansive family. We kept hearing the word "Community." We kept seeing community first hand. We heard the stories of a woman named Diane who has seen her community change before their eyes. We walked to a homeless camp on Wednesday and met people who formed their own community and helped one another survive on the streets. And we gathered on the Columbus Commons on Thursday to experience The Concert for Community. The Harmony Project bring people together for good in our community, recognizing that what brings us together is stronger than what divides us.

We may all have family reunion stories to share. There is value in figuring out how this strange family we call church keeps connected and engaged with the work that God calls us to. This strange family we call church becomes a community for support and encouragement. Maybe we have the opportunity for reunions in God's family more frequently than we once thought. Sunday by Sunday, mission trip by mission trip, baptism by baptism, worship connections, youth retreats, hospital visits, conversations of faith, prayer groups, book studies and so many more. When we see God at work in our lives we are called to be a part of it. These are all opportunities to have a shared story of community. "Who are my mother

and my brothers?” All of our family activities keep us connected to one another and they keep us connected as part of the family – part of God’s much bigger family.

For all the joys and challenges that God’s family brings.  
Thanks be to God.

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