

The Love that Made Us

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

2nd Sunday after Pentecost - June 6, 2021

Texts: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1, Mark 3:19b-35

SCRIPTURE READING 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Paul often ponders the contrast between appearance and reality, the seen and the unseen. Here, he uses that contrast to assure believers of their eternal home in God.

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. *So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure*, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

GOSPEL READING Mark 3:19b-35

Echoing Paul's idea that what we think we see is not always what is, the gospel writer implies that those who think they know Jesus best may not know him at all.

After Jesus had called his twelve disciples and appointed them to share in his ministry, he went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And

looking at those who sat around him, Jesus said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”



A new family has moved in at our house. More specifically, *on* our house. More specifically still, *on* our front door light. They announced their intention with a little heap of dead grass on the stem of the light and a bigger heap on the step below. I thought, well, that'll never work. But they did not lose heart. They persisted, and within a couple of days the straggling wisps had become a stable home on our home, with the additional flourish of a scarf of plastic floating in the breeze. We made the decision not to use our front door or turn on the light (a neighbor's house suffered a devastating fire from a similar nest a couple of years ago). I parked plants all over the stairs to discourage foot traffic. Now we wait while the robins make their family.

Jesus liked to draw lessons from the birds, talking about their value to God, and their tender care for their young. In today's gospel, though, he startles us by disavowing his own mother and siblings and naming a new family. When they come to rescue him from his own insanity (as they see it), he instead looks at those perched around listening to him and says, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” Jesus makes a new family based on love and loyalty. Does that mean he broke the old one apart? Or did he just break open the idea of what family is, and what it means?

Family is not always what it's cracked up to be. How many people do you know who have experienced disappointment in their families? Not all parents and spouses are as loyal and attentive as the birds: families are broken by any number of things. Some fall apart because of abuse or neglect, some split over conflicting loyalties or inheritance disputes. Sometimes family members disown one another for the sickness of addiction, or over religious or political beliefs. Many LGBT friends of my generation, meeting rejection in their families of origin, built nests and networks of supportive friends in similar situations. They made new families, families of hope.



Families or kingdoms divided against themselves “cannot stand,” Jesus warns his disciples, in this gospel. Was that why he built his new family of those who “do the will of God?” This is not exactly helpful if we cannot agree on God's will, and how to do it. But sometimes that's a

process of trial and error. Sometimes we have to learn by experience, and sometimes our experiences can hurt. Sometimes we outgrow the places we started, and break out of circumstances that hold us too tightly; we struggle like baby birds to be free of the shell, the place that no longer contains or defines us.



What comes next for hatchlings is a time of great vulnerability. Baby robins wait anxiously for every grub and worm dropping from a parent's beak; while the parents forage, the kids are susceptible to predators. People who break free from confining spaces, too, emerge tender and in need of care and feeding while they gain strength. Families alone, no matter how strong and committed, need support from outside. To feed each other and to be fed by one another and by

God is our common need. I hold Meg and Brad, Tristan, Quinn and Freya -- who was born on Friday -- close to my heart, and thank God for that loving family. I thank God for all those here who have committed to bring them meals as they bond and grow strong in these early days. You have made a family here at CPC that transcends blood ties. You have chosen to be family, and you are God's chosen family. Together, we nourish one another.

In these days, it's easy to look at the world and see the brokenness. We see things falling apart and fear taking hold. Dismay is easy to latch onto. Dis/ease seems to live in the air, contagious as covid. We catch it from one another. We envision our world breaking apart like the X-press Pearl, the cargo ship sinking off the coast of Sri Lanka, spilling contaminants. But need it be so?



Paul writes of a different sort of loss, in one of the most moving and hopeful passages of the New Testament: "So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure." Did you catch that? It's not that God is preparing a place of glory for us; God is preparing us to receive the glory already prepared. Sometimes that preparation means we need to be broken before we can learn to trust, learn to love. So we do

not lose heart. *We are not broken apart, but we are broken open.*

The challenge is to recognise the breakage for what it is: the loss of what needed to die, the wreckage of what no longer works, giving way to the sweetness of what is new and alive - tender and fragile still, but curious and clamoring to grow into its own place in the world. We live this

spiritually when we acknowledge that Jesus died; that his human body was broken unto death, that the stone shell of the tomb was burst apart, that the one who was lost lives again. And that his Spirit lives within us and within the world, too big for any church or institution to contain. The nest, too, is not our home forever.

We would like to go back to life as we remember it, but is that even possible? Can we instead face our fears for the future, as individuals, as church, as country, and see that God is calling us to something new? Can we accept that things we've clung to as our peace and security must waste away for the new to be born in us and among us? Then we can begin to build a new family of hope. Yes, we may have to give up something cherished to open our doors to new ideas, new ways of doing God's will, new people and families who need to be nurtured and who will nourish us in turn. Gaze for a moment at the world behind these words: alive with color. Do you see a sunset, the death of day, or can you imagine that sun rising, day breaking, yes, *breaking*, over the horizon?

Friends, we do not lose heart. We come like baby birds, opening our mouths to receive the sweet communion of our time together in worship, God's gift to feed us and strengthen us and send us on our way. We are not broken apart, but we are broken open, to accept the love that made each one of us also makes us one, united in love and in God's will. Family. Amen. Thanks be to God.

Prayers

God of growth and abundance, thank you for the rooting seeds, the opening flowers, the diligent bees. We thank you for the birds in song and the eggs warm in their nests, and the promise of summer. May we take what is given and return it with interest: seed as blossom, blossom as fruit, infant to adult, and student as teacher. Make us families of hope.

God of healing, teach us to look beyond what is broken and wasting away to the signs of new life. Help us to look beyond disease to cure. Open us to sharing what we have with others, not just those in our own nest but around the world: spreading tangible things like food and vaccines, and intangibles like hope and purpose, forgiveness and grace. God in your mercy,

May we find your Spirit living and loving in us as we tend the patch we have been given: we pray for those close to us who are hurting or in despair, who have forgotten or turned away from you in disbelief. May those who suffer not be broken apart, but broken open to the work of your Spirit within. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

NB: The only picture taken by me was the first one, of the nest. I will not further invade my housemates' privacy.