

“Are You My Mother?”

Matthew 12:46-50

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • August 25, 2013

In this short reading that closes out chapter twelve of Matthew, Jesus asks and answers the question, “Who is my mother?” When I read that I was immediately reminded of one of the great works of 20th Century literature. You have probably read it yourself or have at least heard of it. It was first published in 1960. If you haven’t read it yet we have it here in the church library. It’s a book by P.D. Eastman called, *Are You My Mother?*

This is the story of a bird whose egg is about to hatch and so she decides to go get some food so it will be available for the baby when he hatches. Of course the egg hatches while she’s gone and so the whole story is about the baby bird’s quest to find his mother. The baby bird discovers that the kitten and the hen and the dog and the cow are not his mother. The old car and the boat and the airplane are not his mother.

Somehow, though, I don’t think this is what Jesus had in mind when he asked, “Who is my mother?” This story comes at the end of chapter 12 where Jesus has had a number of conflicts with the Pharisees and the Scribes, the religious leaders of the time, and the conflicts get more intense each time. And each time Jesus more explicitly tells them who he is – that he is God in the flesh.

Then in today’s reading we’re told that while Jesus is speaking with a group of people, his mother and brothers are outside and want to see him. That seems like a reasonable request, doesn’t it? But instead of getting up to go see them, Jesus says, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Then he points to his disciples and says, “Here are my mother and my brothers!”

In our society today we probably don’t grasp how shocking this would have sounded to a First Century Jew. Children, even grown children, were expect to honor their parents.

And it wasn’t just a good idea, it was the law. There are a number of places in the Old Testament that speak about children and parents. One of the most important is the one we heard a few minutes ago from Deuteronomy 5 from the Ten Commandments: “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”

Also in Deuteronomy 27: “Cursed be anyone who dishonors his father or his mother.” In Exodus 21 we find even harsher words. Verse 15 says, “Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death,” and verse 17 says, “Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.” We find this in more detail in Deuteronomy 21: “If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, and they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones.” The penalty for disrespecting parents was death.

In this story Jesus is, in a sense, disrespecting his own family. It was a serious. But we also know from the gospels that Jesus loved and honored his mother very much. Instead, as he usually does, Jesus says this to illustrate a point. His point is that as important as our family relationships are, our relationships with “God’s family” and our allegiance to Christ are more important.

At this point Jesus’ mother and brothers don’t understand who he is. They have come

to see him so that they can take him away. Mark's gospel tells us that they think he's lost his mind. They are trying to rescue him from himself and from the religious leaders who want to kill him. Earlier in this chapter Jesus said, "whoever is not with me is against me." Here he's trying to illustrate that our allegiance to his Kingdom is more important than our allegiance to our earthly families.

It's a matter of understanding proper priorities. Our first priority in life is to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength. Or as the Westminster Catechism puts it, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Our relationship with Christ is more important than our relationship with our family. But that doesn't mean our families are any less important. Instead we find that when our relationship with Jesus is healthy then our relationships with our family are strengthened.

George Burns used to say that the key to happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family – in another city. We know how important our families are to us. But Jesus here is showing us that a relationship with him brings us into another family, a spiritual family, which is also more important than our earthly families. He says, "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Remember that the definition of the Kingdom of God is wherever his will is done. So anyone who does the will of God is demonstrating the Kingdom and is part of the family.

Today the local expression of that family that we're adopted into is the church. As followers of Jesus we are now part of one very large family. We talk about our "church family" but we probably miss the importance of that phrase. Our relationships with our parents or children or siblings or our extended family have the greatest potential for love but they also have the greatest potential for hurt. That's because the bonds

with our family are usually closer than with anyone else. The church should be a place where we are developing those kinds of close-knit relationships, where we are as close as family.

There are a few principles we can learn from families that apply to the Church as the family of God. First of all, you can't just join a family. It's not like joining the country club or a civic organization where you can quit at any time. You and I are a part of God's family through adoption. None of us has any right to be in the family except that God has chosen us. The Apostle Paul wrote about this in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians. As adopted children, Paul says, we have all the same rights as a natural child.

Second, you can't just quit a family. Sadly, many people try to walk away (or run away) from their family and the responsibilities that come with it. But even if you don't do what you're supposed to do in the family, you can't quit. No matter what you're still a part of the family.

Third, being in a family does come with responsibilities. Proverbs 22 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." One of the primary purposes of the family is to transmit the faith to the next generation. It's even more so in our spiritual family. God gives us a mission to carry out and then he provides the people to accomplish it. That mission is more important than our personal preferences or desires. It means that we take care of each other as if we were family, because we are, and it also means that we have the responsibility to keep bringing our family to Jesus.

So who is your mother? Who are your brothers and sisters? Friends, look around. These are your brothers and sister and mother.

Amen