



# SAINT LUKE'S

“FAMILIES!”

PROPER 5B

GENESIS 3:8-15

PSALM 130

2 CORINTHIANS 4:13-5:1

MARK 3:20-35

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

JUNE 10, 2018

Families are the first relationships we know. We are born or adopted into them. We are in those relationships before we have words to express ourselves, and without our choice or consent. Our earliest sense of self comes from those relationships, and we carry those blessings (and wounds) into adulthood. Jesus is no different. It is part of his full humanity. All the myriad and complicated feelings we have towards our families, whether blood families or adoptive families, Jesus has those too. Today we see how complicated those relationships with family of origin are for Jesus. They are not easy for his family either.

Jesus' family obviously find him a handful. Jesus goes missing on the annual Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem when he is 12.<sup>1</sup> He is found precociously debating with teachers in the Temple. Jesus does not apprentice himself to the family carpentry business in the expected way. As far as we know Jesus never married - another expectation defied. We see that his interactions with his parents and other authority figures are conflicted. Jesus' family loves him to the best of their ability, as most parents do. So here that family love translates into trying to save Jesus by intervention. In some cases, intervention is exactly the right thing to do with loved ones who are in distress - Anthony Bourdain and Kate Spade might still be alive if that had happened. In this case, Jesus is not ill, he is just being Jesus! In those days, mental illness was attributed to demon possession. Today, we might describe Jesus' family's concern as being around manic or delusional behavior. Call it what we will, Jesus' mother and siblings are concerned for Jesus. We can assume there is also some self-interest involved when Jesus' family say: Come home with

<sup>1</sup> Luke 2:41ff.

us (subtext: stop making a fool of yourself and embarrassing the family name).

Jesus takes on the theological error directly – his healing powers do not come from Beelzebub but from God. But he doesn't take on his mother and siblings in the same way. He doesn't say: You are wrong, I am right. Instead, Jesus reframes their relationship with a Yes/And. I do not hear Jesus as rejecting his mother and siblings. He does not say: You are no longer my family. He broadens family. These friends of mine are also family. Not “these friends are *like* family” to me – they *are* family to me. I am related to them and they are related to each other. We would say that Jesus moves from family of origin to family of choice in his orientation and understanding. In the LGBT community, family of choice is a bedrock of support and identity. Yet the idea of family of choice is embedded in the church and foundational to the Jesus movement from the very beginning. Family of choice unites people from backgrounds so different and across divides so vast that they were once considered absolute (Jew/non-Jew; slave/free; male/female). Jesus' family includes anyone who wants to be in it. Nothing is too much trouble for Jesus when it comes to his family. Jesus' family are the ones whose feet he will wash and for whom he will pay the ultimate sacrifice of love.

We can get into arguments with family members that get stuck in Yes/No, all or nothing patterns. Sometimes they are leftover arguments from our childhood. What can we learn from Jesus about reframing

negative patterns and moving toward new possibilities? Being able to reframe old scars from Yes/No into Yes/And matters in our personal lives, our communities and for the peace and well-being of the world.

I remember when I was a young adult berating my parents about their parenting of me and my brother in childhood. There was a time in my early 20s when I didn't go home to visit them for 2 years. In fact, they were wonderful parents but like many young people I went through a phase of thinking they were terrible! I don't remember all my accusations. I do remember that instead of retaliating with a counter-argument, my parents simply said: "Well, we did the best we could. We weren't raised by perfect parents either. We all just do the best we can. *And ...we have always loved you and always will.*" Boom! Like Jesus, my parents didn't get into a "Yes, you did/ No, I didn't" argument. They reframed it into a Yes/And. Starting with a simple statement of their humanity: "Yes, we are not perfect. We are just doing the best we can. *And we love you.*"

What would Jesus do in our family arguments? What would Jesus say? Or not say? *What would Jesus do?* has passed into common language. (Do any of you remember WWJD wrist bands from the late 1990s?) The question: *What would Jesus say? Or not say?* is also worthy of reflection. We can be so eager to avoid the trap the Letter of James identifies as being hearers of the word only and not doers<sup>2</sup> (all talk and no walk), that we overlook the importance of our words. The same Epistle of James identifies the tongue as the organ of the body that can

<sup>2</sup> James 1:22

do the most damage of all.<sup>3</sup> How would Jesus reframe our arguments? How would Jesus reframe our old grudges? Are there times Jesus would choose relationship over proving he is right? Times when Jesus would choose to say nothing when we let fly?

Love is always the bottom line for Jesus. Love is what moves us from stuckness to renewal. Love always moves towards greater freedom. Freedom to serve others, and to grow ourselves in our serving. Freedom to choose how and who to love. And in our freedom, setting others free to do the same. You and I know when we are making a decision - our hearts tell us - whether we are expanding or contracting our generosity of being. Do our relationship choices challenge us to be more forgiving and more generous? And is our circle of caring, our family of choice, expanding? These are the family values that matter most to Jesus.

AMEN

<sup>3</sup> James 3:1-12





THE CHURCH OF ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS  
487 HUDSON STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10014

TEL: 212.924.0562

FAX: 212. 633.2098

WEB SITE: [WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG](http://WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG)

EMAIL: [INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG](mailto:INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG)