

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 6 June 2021

*Holy Spirit, pour out upon us wisdom and understanding, that being taught by you in Holy Scripture, our hearts and minds may be opened to receive all that leads to life and holiness. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35

### ***A new family of God***

I have been in Canberra for two weeks to see my family. It was good to catch up with them especially meeting with my first grandchild. I could see them living well as part of the wider community in Canberra and as part of a church family. On the way back to New Zealand, I cannot help but think about a family as a whole, especially about the family of God.

The reading in Mark informs us of a family of God through the radical words of Jesus - A family of God consists of people who do the will of God. Did Jesus deny the notion of a family relationship by blood, or was he offering a new family relationship? We'll explore these questions through a new definition of family by Jesus. We'll see what it means to do the will of God through the Holy Spirit, and finally, a reason to offer this new family of God for the world.

### ***The family of Jesus vs a family of God***

When the family of Jesus arrive on the scene, they are really outsiders. They are not even allowed to go in and talk to Jesus. They have to pass the word along through the crowd about them. When people say that his family is summoning him from outside the building, Jesus answers with a shocking statement: "who are my mother and my brothers? ... Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."<sup>1</sup> Further, when Jesus speaks, he tells not his relatives but the people who gather about him in the house.

It is good news for those who left everything behind to follow Jesus. In Mark 10:29-30, Jesus said to those who left the house, biological family, or fields for his sake and the sake of the good news would receive a hundredfold now in this age and eternal life in the age to come. Yet scriptures also inform us of the violent deaths of some of the followers of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Their violent

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 3:33-34

<sup>2</sup> About James - Acts 12:1-2; About Peter - John 21:18-19; About Stephen – Acts 7:54-60 together with many church traditions.

deaths show us that they remained as faithful servants of God till they died. Yet it doesn't look like rewards either. If so, a hundredfold reward in this age may mean something else. For the relatives of Jesus, together with the scribes from Jerusalem, Jesus' remarks were very dangerous for social security.

On the one hand, Jesus' new definition of family relativizes the natural family connections so cherished in the Jewish context. But in doing so, it threatens to undermine the basic core of social stability as families/households were the primary social and economic units of first-century society. It is no wonder why Jesus' sanity was mattered to his family.

On the other hand, it establishes a 'new family,' bound together not by blood but by the doing of God's will. It provides a different basis of solidarity. In fact, the doing of God's will applies to any relationships universally, including family relationships by blood.

### ***Doing the will of God through the Holy Spirit***

Jesus' words prompt us to consider the relationship between a family and what it means to know and do God's will. What kinds of families can do God's will by exercising love, justice, protection, holiness and well-being? The reading in 2 Corinthians 4:13 onwards may offer a possible answer.

Paul says that we have the same 'Spirit of faith' recorded in Scripture: "I kept my faith, even when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted'"<sup>3</sup> He quotes it from one of the praise (Hallel) psalms.<sup>4</sup> Reading during Passover, Hallel psalms portray righteous sufferers who rely solely on God's mercy and righteousness, even while they cry out in their affliction. In short, Paul says that we too can trust in the God who enables us to speak even when in a shameful state. It allows us to place our confidence not in ourselves but in the one who raises the dead and brings life out of nothing.<sup>5</sup> Here Paul is speaking about life in faith in general. Yet, it is also about life as a whole in that people are suffering from afflictions incurred in and outside of them. If they are inflicted inwardly, it indicates that the relationship with God is not going well. If it is by outward inflictions, it is also because of the relationships with others or things. In any case, Paul says that keeping faith in God faithfully. What we are able to speak then is the words of praise and thanksgiving. As we continue to do it, it will extend to more and more people, and it will increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. This is doing of God's will as God's household.

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 116:10

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 113-118

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 9

In our story time, we listened to a story titled ‘Two Homes’, and the question was – what made two homes as one family for Alex? We can answer that love for his parents enabled Alex to make two homes as one family. In the story, Alex doesn’t complain about living in two homes. Instead, he just accepts it as it is and adapts himself to the life situation. His way to cope with it is to live as usual as if his mom is in one room and his dad is in another room in the same house. He seems happy, and his dad and mom, too. At the end of the story, we hear that the secret of this happiness is his love for his parents. The love that Alex has is not about buildings or things, but his mom and dad. That love makes these two homes still function as one family. Likewise, the same spirit of faith makes us all be one family of God, and it is not destructible. As Paul says, “...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.”<sup>6</sup>

The first family in the garden of Eden shows what happened to them when they failed to do the will of God. Adam and Eve hide from the presence of the Lord. Their disbelief has not only isolated them but also taken them out of a communion with God. They couldn’t speak as they lost a thanksgiving and praise to the glory of God. Even so, God didn’t stop loving them, and the son of God came into being to rescue us.

What does it mean to us as the church today? We live the gospel, and we are doing the ‘will of God’ while without even knowing we are doing it. It makes us be mother, brother, sister of a new family of God. When a family boundary expands beyond space and time, it may indeed include several hundredfolds of fields, houses, families and all in this age and the age to come. The apostles and the followers of Jesus were able to die in peace of God because they knew that Jesus had conquered the world.<sup>7</sup> For them, knowing the truth was a hundredfold reward and eternal life. May God help us expand this household through the same spirit of faith and the truth so that all people in the world will be the new family of God. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:1

<sup>7</sup> John 16:33