

## **“Family Matters”**

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First Presbyterian Church  
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**New Testament Lesson: Luke 4:21-30**

**Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 71:17-21**

So, last week we heard read the scripture Jesus is talking about when he says, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” It is the Isaiah passage about Jesus being the one who brings good news to the poor, proclaims release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, lets the oppressed go free, and proclaims the year of the Lord’s favor.

And we discovered in that scripture eight steps to a faithful and fruitful life based on how Jesus approached his earthly ministry. (During worship last Sunday, I gave everyone a bookmark listing the eight steps and encouraged you to look at them, look at yourself – where you are in the eight steps – and then take that next step, wherever you are and wherever it might lead, trusting the outcome to God).

Today, we hear about the people’s reaction to who Jesus is, what he brings, and what he calls us to do – and be. Jesus is calling us to be partners with him in ministry. That’s what he desired for the people of Nazareth in today’s New Testament reading, and that’s what he desires from us – partnership in ministry, partnership in becoming better Christians, partnership in bringing people to the faith, partnership in growing the body of Christ, which is the church.

I’d like us to look at just one aspect of today’s reading, because it can really help us to be better partners in Christ. When Jesus told them who he really is and what he really expects from them, the people of Nazareth said (quote), “Is not this Joseph’s son?” What an odd thing to say in response to the Jesus we know and love, pointing to his earthly family.

And yet, the fact that they point back to Jesus’ family is exactly what I want us to look at today, because it’s so helpful to us as we seek to recognize, respect and follow Jesus.

Today is all about family – your family (however you define that) and where Jesus is in your family. Is Jesus a part of your family? Is he? And if not, why not? How much or how little Jesus is a part of your family – my family, our families, even our church family – is a direct outgrowth of what we see happening in today’s reading.

The people of Nazareth – Jesus’ hometown – respond to him and all he promises saying, “Is not this Joseph’s son,” which begs the question, what is the role of family when it comes to Jesus?

As you think about your place in the family – as a son or daughter, father or mother, aunt or uncle, grandfather or grandmother, brother or sister/big or little – as you think about where you fit in and what you’ve experienced, ask yourself, where is Jesus in my family, where is Jesus in me as a member of my family. Think about for a moment: where is Jesus in you, and your family. Now let’s look at where Jesus was in his family.

Jesus comes to his hometown – he is a son of Nazareth, you might say – and they lead him to the edge of a cliff trying to throw him to his death. We would never do that to a member of our family, would we???

And yet, I would say that we do that all the time – we kill off our family members all the time. Well, not actually kill them. But we kill off each other’s hopes and dreams, we kill off each other’s sense of worth and acceptance, we kill off each other’s place in the family (or our own place in the family, based on how we respond to one another).

Do you know what I’m talking about here? Family members have that power over one another, don’t they? We have the power to spiritually and emotionally damage or even put an end to each other’s core sense of being.

And Jesus is saying it doesn’t have to be that way! As brothers and sisters in Christ, as children of God, we are given the power to overcome all this, not only in the fullness of time but at this time, on this day, at this moment.

As the Apostle John said, Jesus “came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.”

In order for us to exercise and enjoy that power – the power to be children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ – we have to have Jesus at the heart of our families! Can I get an Amen?

It’s like the woman at a party who said to a woman she just met, “Aren’t you wearing your wedding ring on the wrong finger?” And the other woman said, “Yes, I am. I married the wrong man.”

When our families don’t work – we cope. Once family, always family – and that’s true even for folks who get divorced. We cope, as families, present and past.

But is that the best we can do? No, it’s not. There is a better way than merely coping with a bad or troubled family situation. And that way is the way of Jesus Christ. To have Jesus heal your family relationships – or any relationship in any family-like group you’re a part of – you have to have Jesus as a part of the family, maybe even the head of the family.

How about that?!? How about having Jesus be the head of the family. Not you, not your spouse, not your mother or father, but Jesus.

Jesus as the head of the family could really make a difference. I'm certain it could make a difference for each and every one of us. But that may be a stretch for many of us. I don't know any family that looks to Jesus perfectly in all that they do. We can all do better.

So, let's start there. Let's start by inviting Jesus to be a part of the family, and then work our way up from there – eh, I mean allow Jesus to work his way up from there, to be ever more in the lead. Jesus wants to be the one we turn to for love and protection and support and forgiveness and sustenance and healing and all that Jesus offers us, not just individually but as families! Maybe particularly, as families.

Maybe that's where Jesus could do the most amazing miracles – in our families. Maybe that's where the greatest blessings are to be found. Yes, I think that's right, don't you?

Here are a few easy ways to bring Jesus into your family.

No. 1 – Pray for one another. Take five or 10 minutes every day to pray for the members of your family, or whoever it is you count as family. You might even ask them what they would like you to pray for them, and maybe even pray together as a family. That would bring Jesus closer to the family, don't you think?

No. 2 – Read a bit of scripture once in while. All alone or with a family member, actually go online or fire up your Bible app and read a verse or two. If that's all you did, I guarantee you it would bring Jesus closer to you and your family. (Oh, and you can also do it "old-school" by actually opening up the Good Book.)

No. 3 – ... Well, why should I have all the fun? You tell me. What's another way to have more Jesus in the life your family? Anybody? Something you do or something you can think of that would bring Jesus a little closer? How about going to church as a family – easier said than done these days, I know? But maybe starting with prayer and scripture at home would lead to that.

No. 4 – Have Sunday dinner and pray before the meal.

No. 5 – Look at family wedding albums/videos together.

No. 6 – Serve together in the community.

No. 7 – Start a new family tradition.

There are a 101 ways to have Jesus be a bigger part of our lives as families – families of origin, families of marriage, families of church members, workplaces, classrooms, service groups; families of God. And it doesn't take that much to get started. It's not that hard. The hardest part is just doing it. That was true for Naaman the Syrian who Jesus talks about in today's New Testament reading (you can read about that in today's sermon giveaway) and it's true for us.

Yes, that's right, I have **another sermon giveaway** for you to take home today. What I have for you is a Family Portrait in Scripture, based on today's New Testament reading and the Old Testament passage about the prophet Elisha and Naaman the Syrian that Jesus talks about today.

You'll also see at the bottom of your Family Portrait in Scripture seven simple things we can do to bring Jesus closer to the family the families we have and/or claim as our own. And the key here is simple things.

The bottom line in this scripture you have here to look at and think about is that Naaman was ready to walk away from the blessings of the LORD because of his pride and preconceived notions of what's possible, because he knew better than even the LORD how the world should work. And then someone he knew and trusted encouraged him to set aside his arguments and his resistance and to take the simple step that was laid out before him on the path toward wholeness and healing. And he took that simple step, and he was healed, made whole again by God.

So, the question for us is, when it comes to the healing and wholeness and blessings that Jesus desires for our lives and our families, are we willing to take even just one of the simple steps listed on today's sermon giveaway?

Or, are we going to be like Naaman – all argumentative and resistant? Are we as families willing to do just that much? Or are we going to be like Naaman's encourager – Naaman's brother in arms – and help ourselves AND our loved ones to draw closer to Jesus and all that he promises? That's our choice – to be resistant or to be an encouragement, encouraging one another in Christ. Amen.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

God of us all, we offer our thanks that you are always with us, even when we fail to acknowledge your presence. We thank you for your faithfulness and love, which always enfolds us.

We pray for those who feel as though they are sitting on the fringe of life. Let our love be so apparent that we draw in those who sit in pain.

Enable them, through the grace of your love, to move from living on the edges to living in the fullness of life. We pray that they might taste the richness which life with you offers.

We pray for those who feel they have lost their way. In these moments of stillness, we pray for those we name in our hearts, that they may somehow find their way back to you.

We offer our prayers as confident children of God, knowing that, like the shepherd, you wait with love and open arms to welcome us home as we travel in the footsteps of your son Jesus Christ, who taught us the perfect prayer, the Lord's prayer, that we pray together saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we  
forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,  
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever.  
Amen.**