

Family is a treasure

Luke 14:25-33

"One family. One bill," says Spring, the wireless and phone service company. Family is one of the things we treasure in life. Wherever we might be thoughts about family come to mind. Whether they stay for a short period of time, or for very long, we still keep some family ties. Considering the many sources available we may find a lot of definitions about what a family is. The term family generally refers to a group of people. Members of that group can be related by blood, by adoption or simply by acceptance. It could also be a group of people united by certain convictions or a common affiliation.

That is why when people ask me about my family in Michigan. I often say that I do not have blood family in Michigan, but I do have a faith-based family, a Christian family through the church.

The first time I really missed my parents and siblings was in 1991, I was about 14 years old. I went from the country part in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, to Acapulco, about 300 miles from my hometown Villa Madero. My uncle Raymundo, my mother's brother offered to help me to go to high school in Acapulco, where he was living and working. My parents were not going to send me to school any more. Having an education has always been important in the family, but we did not have the means to receive it. We have no high school in Villa Madero either. I had to go to the next town if I wanted to continue going to school. I was going to stop in 9th grade because we were so poor we could not afford to pay for transportation, meals and for school materials.

When I was in Acapulco, I got very homesick during the first year, but I managed to finish and I graduated. Living away from my family gave me the opportunity to realize that other people can become family to us. It doesn't always have to be blood family. People who care for one another, those who show love and support, they are family.

My desire to do something about ending poverty in my family brought me to Wisconsin, where some friends were going to help me find a job. I did stop in Los Angeles California to see my older sister Rossy and older brother Cosme, who I had not seen in more than five years. On a Sunday my sister Rossy invited me to the local Presbyterian Church they attended. I accepted. I had never been in a church building other than the Roman Catholic ones. I went along because I wanted to give thanks to God for protecting me during the journey from Mexico to the United States and for opening doors to new possibilities. I also want to give thanks for allowing me to be around some family members.

Before I left for Wisconsin my sister Rossy said, "When you get to Wisconsin try to find a church there. That is going to be your Christian family. It will guide you, will give you good advice, and will help you do positive things." Here we are members of God's family. It was not easy to get to this point. All of us had to give up something in order to take in the gospel and the idea of belonging to the church.

The gospel according to Luke reminds us about another moment of realization among the close followers of Jesus, where he makes the statement, "You cannot be my disciple, unless you love me more than you love your father and mother, your wife and children, and your brothers and sisters. You cannot come with me unless you love me more than you love your own life."

The proclamation of the gospel was in jeopardy. Jesus was going to be crucified. The situation was a matter of life or death. There was going to be a possibility to panic, and to go through a time of crisis. Jesus had to be up front and bold. He knew what their treasure was—their families. If Jesus' followers were willing to give up their families, at least to get the movement going during critical times, then he got them. Their family was the ultimate thing they would have held onto. That was their treasure. They could not be his disciples unless they gave up everything they had. At the time it seemed like a very cruel thing to do, but with Jesus, at the end of the day they would have saved their own lives and also saved their families.

The disciples' decision to follow Jesus would have set them against their families because they were going to be accused of neglecting their household, but they knew that in the long run they would end up helping them and helping others.

We all have to give up something in order to help ourselves and to save our families. I had to give up the fear of being called 'fanatic' when I began attending the United Methodist Church in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. I had to give up some of my salary in order to help my younger sister who was in college in Mexico. I had to give up some of my teenage years and bad behavior in order to pursue what would be helpful to improve my living conditions and the living conditions of my siblings.

Whatever it is that is bothering you, that is an obstacle between you and your family. Give it up. At the moment it may look like you are a loser, but sometime later it will bring goodness to you and to your family. It is in our nature to care for others and to want to help others. Many of the extraordinary things we do often are inspired because we are thinking about someone else other than just ourselves.

Nick Schuyler, an ex-football player said Monday March second that he managed to survive more than 36 harrowing hours lost at sea by thinking about his mother. Moments after his fishing boat tipped over he said to himself, "Mom, you're not going to go to my funeral."

Many great things we have accomplished not because we want to do them for ourselves, but because we want to benefit others. Christ went to the cross not to save himself, but to save us. God does not only do things in the universe for the sake of own glory and honor, but for the benefit of humanity.

We older members and newer members of God's church have a legacy. The legacy of giving up only the things that stand before us as obstacles which want to stop us from moving forward. We give up the things that try to prevent us from seen God's dreams and our personal dreams come through. We have goals, we have the desire, we have talent, we can find the tools, we have family support, and God's help. We can get through the difficult times. We can do it.

We all have seen good days as well as bad days. Yesterday was a very stormy day. Today may be a very stormy day, but tomorrow the sun will shine again. We may be concerned and worried about the situation going on in the entire nation and in the rest of the world. It is true! These are good reasons for doing that. It is also true that history teaches us that there have been times like this before, and yet countries, businesses, factories, jobs, families, incomes have regained life.

For example, the economic situation in the United States has had it ups and downs since the 1880's. There was moderate growth in the mid '70s. Several hard years in the late '70s and early 1980s. An explosion of growth in the mid-to-late '80s, a mild recession in the early 1990s. Growth for the rest of the decade, a couple of bad years after the technology bubble, another period of extraordinary expansion, and now what some people call the "Panic of 2008."

Harold Edwards, chief executive of Limoneira Co. of Santa Paula, California Wrote, "History has taught us that these hard times, too, shall pass. To every thing there is a season, even misery. My country, like my company, has weathered the worst of everything and managed to prosper. That's what we do. We are Americans; we are adventurers, explorers, optimists. We endure and then we succeed, and the more of us who can maintain our confidence and perspective, the faster this season of misery will pass into prosperity."

Whatever we have to do we will do it not just for ourselves, we will do it for our families. For both, the present and the future. We can say that a family is "two or more people who share goals and values, have long-term commitments to one another, and believe that the spirit and meaning of family exist through good times and bad." United we can accomplish more. To close I would like to share with you what Kahlil Gibran said in 1923. "Yesterday is but today's memory and tomorrow is today's dream." We can say, "even if sometimes we fall back, today we spring forward" (daylight saving time begins).