

When Jesus Got Lost and other REAL Stories about Family in the Bible

Luke 2: 41-52

Mother's Day 2008

Ypsilanti First United Methodist Church

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Happy Mother's Day to all the mom's out there. Whether you are a mother, a grandmother, an aunt, a cousin, a daughter or a friend, today is a day when we celebrate you and all the things you are. It is also a day when we celebrate the family.

With all his holiness and divinity, we often forget that Jesus was also a real human being, who lived in a real human family and had real human parents. That is why I like to read today's scripture, where we find the story of Jesus as a teenager. In this story, Jesus takes off on his parents, leaving them worried sick about him and his whereabouts. And when they find him, a day later, he mouths off to them about doing God's work and he essentially says "What's your problem mom and dad anyway?"

I like the way Eugene Peterson's the Message tells the story...to me it sounds more like a real honest to goodness family—where people hurt each other and often say or do the wrong the thing--to me, this story sounds like a real family where people don't always understand each other, and where people hold grudges. To me, it sounds more like a real family where people do eventually mature, grow and change. ---

According to the Message the story goes like this... "They found Jesus in the Temple seated among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. The teachers were all quite taken with him, impressed with the sharpness of his answers. But his parents were not impressed, they were upset and hurt.

His mother said 'young man why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been half out of our minds looking for you.'

He said [And I love this answer!] 'Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know I had to be here, dealing with the things of my Father?' But they had no idea what he was talking about.

So he went back to Nazareth with them. His mother held these things dearly, deep within herself [It's hard to let them go sometimes]. And Jesus matured, growing in both body and spirit, blessed by both God and people." ⁱ

I think this last sentence is so important, because it reminds us all that God's blessing is there for us and our families.

Now over the years, there has grown a major disconnection between the church's image of "the good family" and the many biblical stories of the human family.ⁱⁱ The truth is that the Bible contains a rich record of all sorts of family drama, and all kinds of family configurations. Most of them and the lives they live are a far cry from the "good family" image sometimes called "the traditional family" that the institutional church has deemed the norm and in some cases the only kind of family that gets God's blessing.

The truth is that Scripture disagrees with this "good family myth" and instead describes all kinds of family drama and all kinds of family configurations. The truth is that God's love and blessing are there for all kinds of families as well as all kinds of family dramas.

Adam and Eve have one son who kills their other son. Jacob lies to his father and steals from his brother, Esau and he has children with four different women. Abraham passes off his wife Sarah as his sister to appease the Pharaoh, who takes said "sister" into his harem. Sarah gives her servant Hagar to Abraham and then abuses the servant for doing exactly what Sarah has asked Hagar to do—give Abraham a son. Joseph's older brothers, ticked at him because they think dad likes him best, sell him into slavery and then lie to their father, telling him that Joseph had died. King David conspires to cause the death of the soldier Uriah in battle and marries Uriah's widow Bathsheba, whom he has had an affair with. Delilah ingratiates herself with Samson in order to destroy his physical ability to challenge her people.

The New Testament offers fewer graphic stories of household havoc, but it portrays relationship loss and brokenness frequently in the situations of women and other persons who are defined physically or mental as marginal. Many women in the gospels are widowed, single parents, or otherwise compromised in their marital and economic status, which during biblical times meant everything in society.

The truth is that scripture describes all kinds of family drama and all kinds of families—from the traditional to the non traditional. We even have Jesus running away from his parents and his parents worried sick about him. The problem of course is that Hallmark and society and even the church—hold up a myth of "good family" and this myth often makes those of us with real families and different kinds of family configurations feel as if we have the wrong life story, one of little or no interest to the church and perhaps of only marginal interest to God.ⁱⁱⁱ

The truth is that nothing could be further from the truth. I believe that the scriptures are full of all kinds of families and all kinds of family drama, exactly because God wants us to understand that God

can and does work with all kinds of people, all kinds of family and even through all kinds of family drama.

The God of scriptures repeatedly offers an unaccountable grace, taking on and developing as followers, the worst sort of failed family members imaginable. What this tells me is that there is hope for all of us--and that rather than hide our family dramas, or be embarrassed about them—what we need to do is be honest--and look to God for healing and blessing as we live our lives. For the truth is that the problems in families are real, but God is just as real.

The other truth is that in the church and through the church God gives us a family—a place where we can belong, a place where we are loved and accepted, welcomed and cherished. Is it perfect? Of course not, but it is the family that God gives us—an alternative place where we play by different values—God’s family values—which are grounded in God’s amazing grace—and held together with forgiveness and unconditional love—Where we are moved by love to reach out to others in love and to accept the help that is offered to us.

Sara Tucholsky and Mallory Holtman, both college seniors were on opposite teams the last Saturday in April when Central Washington played Western Oregon in softball. Sara had never hit a homerun and Mallory was the league leader in homeruns. Sara stood at the plate, two of her teammates were already on base when she swung the bat and it connected with the ball and sailed over the centerfield fence—a home run, her first one ever! Sara began her jog around the bases, but as she rounded first, her foot missed the bag—so she turned back to tag it again—only when she turned something popped in her leg and she fell to the dirt with a torn ACL. She lay in a heap, unable to move—and the rules being the rules—she must round the bases or her homerun would be ruled a two run single. No one from Sara’s team, nor her coaches or trainers could touch her or she would be called out as another rule states that teammates and coaches can’t interfere with a runner in play. As her coaches and the game umpires discussed what to do, they heard Mallory’s voice say “Excuse me, would it be O.K. if we carried her around the bases and she touched each bag?”

Mallory and short stop Liz Wallace both from the other team did just that. They bent down and lifted Sara off the ground. Then they slowly carried her around the bases—stopping at each one to gently touch Sara’s left foot to each bag so her home run would count.

And as Sara was carried across home plate by members of the opposing team, players from both teams were there to greet her. Like a big family, they welcomed Sara home, celebrated her accomplishment knowing that without the whole human family she wouldn’t have made it there. The coaches, trainers, umpires and the crowd in the stands gave them all a long standing ovation, wiping

tears from their eyes, realizing they had just witnessed one of the greatest homeruns of all time.

When asked later about why she decided to help Sara, Mallory replied that "it was just the right thing to do and that anyone else would have done it." Sara's coach through tears said "It was such a lesson that we learned today -- that it's not all about winning. And we forget that, because as coaches, we're always trying to get to the top. We forget that. But I will never, ever forget this moment. It's changed me, and I'm sure it's changed my players."^{iv}

This Mother's Day may you also remember what is most important—that families are real and God's love is just as real. That God created all kinds of families— and that God loves and blesses all kinds of families. And that when we least expect it and through who we least expect, God blesses us and our families. It is not easy, but it is real. These are the kind of family values we can believe in. Amen.

ⁱ Petersen, Eugene. *The Message—The Bible in Contemporary Language*

ⁱⁱ Bate, Barbara "The Family of God, Broken and Beloved" from *The Living Pulpit* issue on Family, July-September, 1999 vol. * No. 3 pp. 16-17

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid; see also "Family Picnic: Bible Stories for Everyone" by Craig Anderson from *The Living Pulpit* issue on Family as referenced above

^{iv} See the following website: www.sports.espn.go.com/ncaa/columns/story?id=3372631