

Second Sunday of Lent



The bonds of family, friends and community

"Woman, behold, your son! Behold, your mother."

John 19: 26-27

Opening Prayer (from Psalm 68)

Sing to God,
sing in praise of God's name,
extol the One who rides on the clouds;
rejoice before God—his name is the LORD.
A father to the fatherless,
a defender of widows,
God dwells in holiness.
God sets the lonely in families.
God gives strength to the people;
Blessed be the name of God.
Amen

And/Or

O God, who loves us as a mother loves her children,
hear our prayer for all homes and families.
Bless those whom we love;
may our dwellings be fit places for your presence.
Help us to live in peace with our dear ones,
that we may encourage one another in common tasks,
and enjoy our common pleasures.
Come amongst us with your love and enliven us with your Holy Spirit.
(From "Common Order: A Canadian Book of Service of Worship" compiled and edited by Ian S. Wishart)



Thoughts to Ponder...

What do you feel when you think about family? Perhaps you feel grief because of the loss of a loved one, happiness because of the joy your family brings, sadness because you have been longing for a family of your own, or brokenness amid abandonment or lost relationships. Consider how many different family systems and groups you are part of and all the different feelings you have when you hear the word "family."

Family

For some, the idea of family stirs joy at the thought of meals around a table, laughter, love, support and love. For others, the idea of family brings reminders of broken relationships, loved ones who have died, or a longing for something that does not seem attainable. There are children waiting for families to adopt or foster them. And there are parents waiting to have children either because of infertility or the delays of adoption. And there are people who have been abandoned by their families. Family can stir up the best and worst feelings in us.

Jesus' own relationship and teaching about family was complex. On the one hand, his mother is said to have been among those who were with him throughout his life. At the same time, we hear very little about his other family bonds. And in places in the New Testament, such as in Luke 14:25-27, Jesus places the community of those seeking the reign of God above family bonds. (Many people were traveling with Jesus. He said to them, "If you come to me but will not leave your family, you cannot be my follower. You must love me more than your father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters—even more than your own life!" Luke 14:25-26.)

In the process of Jesus' death on the cross, he recognized what the death of her eldest son would cause his mother. He saw one of his closest friends standing in horror at the crucifixion, knowing John's loss and grief. And even in the midst of Jesus' own pain, he took care to consider the needs of his family and to provide ongoing family for his mother and for John. In the Gospel of John, Chapter 19, verses 26-27, it is written that "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home." This meant that John had the financial and moral responsibility to take care of Mary as a widow who had lost her eldest son.

God's provision of family does not always happen through biology and genetics, but through the gift of the family of God—those called God's children. In our baptism, we are made part of the household of faith and are reminded that in God's family, "water is thicker than blood." Sometimes the Church becomes the greatest place to enact our love for one another in family. This can be through a child involved in a couple's life who is struggling to have children, or an elderly person who is cared for by younger "relatives" in the faith. It can be by a widow inviting a college student to live with her, or homeowners inviting a person to live in their spare room through a time of transition. Being as family in the church is a radical act of hospitality and a reordering of social relationships with broad implications.

Read the Story: John 19:25-27





Questions for Reflection

1. Are there parts of your family that you feel are missing (a loved one who has died, etc)? Who are they, and how does this affect your family?
2. How have you found a family in the church? Are there any special individuals who act as a grandparent, siblings or an aunt or uncle who have provided special wisdom and care in your life?
3. How might you provide family for someone else who needs it right now?

Practicing Jesus' 7 Last Words

Choose one (or more) of the following activity options to do this week as you consider the idea of family.

Sharing a meal: Invite someone from your church into your home for a meal. This should not be someone you meet with regularly but someone new, who may particularly benefit from an invitation.

Make a card: Spend some time handwriting and decorating a card for someone in your congregation who has recently lost a family member.

Food delivery: Deliver a meal (homemade or takeout) to someone in your congregation who is sick or homebound. When you deliver the meal, stay for a visit with the person, and pray together.

Look up the "Dimension's of Poverty" at <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/topics-start/poverty> or the United Nation's "Ending Poverty" page at <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ending-poverty> to read about poverty in the world.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God,
giver of life and all that is good,
thank you for providing for us and blessing us
with communities and relationships that reflect your love.
Summon us and bless us to respond to your call
to live in love and community with one another.
Amen.

