

A New Family

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for the Sunday, May 11th. My name is Kent Dixon and it's my joy to be the pastor here. Happy Mother's Day. A few people said, I'm not a mom, but you get flowers anyway because we care about you no less, right?

For many people, Mother's Day is a time to celebrate their mom. And if you are a mom, maybe you've already been celebrated today or you're anticipating that happening. Remember, you get the whole day, no matter what anybody says, it's in the name, Mother's Day. Moms are often presented with flowers or gifts on Mother's Day or even breakfast in bed. That didn't happen at our house because my wife is now married to a pastor. But for some of us, Mother's Day can be a time of celebration, can't it? And yet for others, Mother's Day can be hard. Mother's Day can be a complicated time.

And I want to take a moment to acknowledge that. It can be a reminder of a relationship that is broken and may still be broken. One that may seem to have no hope of being repaired.

[1 : 09] For others, it may be a reminder of loss. The loss of a spouse, a parent, a friend, a sibling, so many relationships.

But this morning, I want to take some time to put some of those things aside as much as we can. For the moms who are here this morning in person or listening on the website in the days ahead, thank you sincerely for all you have done.

I know it's not easy. I have witnessed the hard times in our life. But thank you for staying the course. Thank you for being faithful and loving and at times human.

I pray that you would forgive yourselves for the things that you cannot seem to forgive or let go of. I pray that you would celebrate the victories in your life and in the lives of your children and your family.

You are loved and you are valued. May God bless each one of you this morning and every day. God bless you. Happy Mother's Day.

[2 : 14] We got a full service today, folks. Full of lots of rich and important pieces. And you've heard me say in the past that the role of a pastor can have lots of ups and downs, right?

We counsel people who are grieving. We officiate funerals. We visit people who are sick. We say goodbye to friends and people who have been part of our lives as pastors.

But we also have the honor of blessing and dedicating children. Of officiating weddings and celebrating other milestones with people. In 2023, I preached a two-part sermon on church membership.

God's plan for the church and the model that we actually see throughout local churches in the New Testament was not a Sunday-only experience. And you've probably heard me use that phrase, too. Not a time that we only gather together on Sundays. That wasn't the only intention of the church. God's plan for the local church has always been for it to be a body.

[3 : 21] A gathering of individual parts. Individual people or members of that body. A place where equally broken and loved and redeemed people can gather together to worship God and to serve each other and love on each other, too.

We're called to be committed members of a local church. Whatever that looks like for you. And the reason for that is because we have been gifted by God.

We've been given skills and abilities and gifts and insights and all kinds of things that God intends for us to use to bless other people. And in the same way, the unique gifts and skills and abilities and all the things that God has imbued other people with can be blessings to us as well.

So I want to invite Joanne Kinoshita. And Bryson is not here. So imagine Bryson here at tier two. Len and Carol, Mudrick. Eileen Shuchuk.

And Jenna, Taves. Come up to the front with me. Okay, so we'll do three on this side and maybe two on this side, if that's okay.

[4 : 34] And I told them all, you don't have to say a word, so don't panic. So these folks have all recently made a decision to formalize their connection to our church by becoming members.

We're recognizing that this morning. We're presenting them with certificates to mark this occasion. And so then I will, when I present the certificates, I'll also invite you all to stand as I pray for them. So before I do that, this is the part they didn't know, I'm going to ask all of you as a group some basic questions about Christianity and your role in the church.

So please answer them in the affirmative by saying I do if you agree with these questions. Do you confess faith in Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?

And do you desire above all to live for him? Do you desire to join this congregation known as Bramard Baptist Church? That was it. That was a short one.

[5 : 39] There's a lot of nervous tension I'm feeling. Do you declare your intention to live in harmony with the theology and beliefs of this church? Do you promise to nurture your walk with the Lord through the spiritual disciplines and to love other believers in this church?

Do you promise to support this congregation by your faithful attendance at its services, by your encouragement of its leaders, the willing use of your talents in its ministry, and the giving of your means as God has prospered you?

Would you stand as I pray for these folks? Lord Jesus, you are the head of this church. Thank you that we get to be a part of your people.

Thank you that you pursued us and opened our hearts and minds and granted us faith in you. Lord, we thank you for Joanne and Bryson and Len and Carol and Eileen and Jenna and that they have formally joined our church today.

I pray that you will help them to grow in their knowledge of you, that they would seek to glorify and obey you with their lives. Lord, I ask that you would protect them from the evil one and continue to give them a love for their local church.

[6 : 54] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Hugs to all of you. You may be seated. Everyone can be seated. If you want to see the certificates, you can do that.

I said to Michelle, maybe I'll leave them out of the envelopes. And she said, no, put them in the envelopes. People can look later. I just do what I'm told sometimes, which is not the worst choice always.

So we're continuing in our short sermon series that we began on Easter Sunday called Made New, How Easter Changes Everything. The resurrection of Jesus changes everything.

It changed everything. Is that a surprise to you? Right? Has it changed everything for you? I hope so. The residual effects of Easter echo into our present day reality.

Men and women continue to place their hope and faith and trust in our risen Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We considered last week, or last week, two weeks ago, that the journey of faith begins with confession.

[8 : 04] But it's sustained by commitment. So when we're found in Christ, the old ways of living are gone. And we are made new. A new family.

That's our sermon title for this morning. So let's remember that this morning we're here today because of the grace of God that was made available to us. And that grace was made available to us through Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

As Christians, we can never lose sight of the power of Easter because it made everything new. It makes us new and continues to give us that promise every day.

In the first week of this series, we learned that it's our faith in Christ that transforms people into who God always intended for them to be. Then the week after that, we discover that because of the grace of God, we can move past our past.

Do you remember that? Our sins and mistakes do not have the final say over who we are. Jesus does. And now this week, we're going to take a look at another part of the far-reaching effects of the resurrection.

[9 : 17] Because when God makes us new, we are adopted into his family. So it's kind of fitting in a way that we just looked at membership, right?

Jesus' resurrection makes us new too. It didn't just make him new. Grace changes our relationship with God from enemies to friends.

The most powerful word that we're given in the scripture is that our relationship with God even goes beyond that, goes a step beyond that, quite a large step. Because scripture tells us that God became our father.

We're invited into his family because we have been adopted by him. Let's hear the words of John 1, 9 to 13. And if you want to open in your Bible and follow along, or it will be your audio book version for this morning.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

[10:36] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God. When Jesus came into the world, there were two reactions to his arrival, and we've seen them a little bit in our study of the book of Acts.

Some received him as the Savior of the world, the Messiah, right? Whether their definition of Messiah was a little shaky and very specific and needed time to develop.

But others rejected him, right? We recognize that in Scripture. Outright rejected him. Rejected him as a fake. Rejected him as a fraud.

Rejected him as evil. And all the kinds of things that we see in the New Testament that people basically accused Jesus of being. But then John tells us that those who did receive him, to those people, God gave the right to become children of God.

[11:50] To become adopted into his family. So based on our faith in Jesus, we're grafted into, there's a good springtime metaphor, we're grafted into God's family.

With him as our father, and Jesus as our brother. Pretty good lineage. But this adoption, as John says there, has nothing to do with physical birth.

But rather, it is a spiritual one. So we become reborn of God by the grace offered to us in Christ Jesus. And everyone is welcome.

Do you feel welcome all the time, in every situation in your life? Do you feel like an outsider sometimes? That's the amazing thing about the family of God. I think it's easy to feel like we don't belong in God's family.

Right? Maybe we think we have too many blemishes. Maybe we feel like we make too many mistakes. I am not worthy. Do you think that in your own head? But when you begin to look at Jesus' family tree, you probably know where I'm going here, you begin to see that, guess what?

[13:00] We all fit right in. The book of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus. And here are some of the names that show up. Jacob was a liar.

David, great king, right? An adulterer. And Rahab was a prostitute. So what can seem like a list of broken and flawed people, upon further examination, take a closer look, becomes a beautiful tapestry of people.

People who are loved by God and welcomed into his family, regardless of their past, or who they think they are, or who society thinks they are.

That's irrelevant to God. There's a story I read about a little boy named Jonathan. He was four years old. He was trying to learn the Lord's Prayer by listening to others as they recited it on Sunday mornings.

Finally, he was ready to give it a shot. Full of confidence one Sunday, he belted out the prayer to the best of his ability, praying, Our Father, who art in heaven, I know you know my name.

[14:11] Cute, right? Though Jonathan may have gotten the prayer wrong, do you recognize it? In the end, he was actually right. God does know his name.

God knows each of our names. He knows everything about us, and he loves us just the same.

Friends, the resurrection makes us new by giving us new birth into this amazing new spiritual family.

There are incredible benefits that come to us by being part of the family of God. And these are put on display, fortunately again for us, in the book of Acts in the early church.

So let's hear the words of Acts 2, 42-47 again. If you want to turn to Acts 2, 42-47, or audiobook version. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

[15:26] Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. The first Christians really weren't that different from you and me.

They were looking for a place to belong, right? They needed an intentional community to be a part of. They were facing the struggle of persecution.

They no longer felt at home in their Jewish faith, the earliest Christians, because of their dedication to a risen Christ. That is not Judaism, right?

They ultimately, though, found what they were longing for in the family of God. As we know from our study in the book of Acts, the Bible tells us that these early Christians spent time together under the teaching of the apostles.

[16:27] And they also fellowshiped together in community around the table. They prayed with and for each other. They shared with each other, as we heard in that passage.

They sacrificially met each other's needs. They enjoyed each other's presence. Is that inconceivable to you? They shared in the common bond of Christ's love, right?

They were united under this umbrella of God's family. So what is it about godly community that's attractive? Well, in that passage we just heard, that last verse, verse 47, is perhaps the most compelling part of that passage that we just heard.

Because this family that God was building, the church, was so attractive that their numbers grew daily. People outside of God's family saw something that they wanted to be a part of.

Have you ever done that? I remember as a kid going to my friends, I had an amazing family, but going to friends' families and seeing different dynamics and different relationships and interactions and thinking, that's cool, I want to be part of that.

[17:38] So I had lots of friends that would include me around their dinner table or other places. But what was it about God's family that was so attractive?

What made it something people wanted to be part of? Well, the first thing that people saw that was attractive is that the family of God does life together. We most fully experience the love and grace of God in connection with other Christians.

The early church understood it, right? I think we get glimpses of what the early church experienced and we can lean into it whenever we find it and seek to be more intentional about it.

But the early church Christians worshipped together. They ate together. They prayed together.

They enjoyed each other's company. And they shared openly with glad and sincere hearts.

So with all these elements present, it causes this communal flourishing that probably wouldn't be possible otherwise, right? When you care about other people and they care about you, there's something pretty special that happens there.

[18:46] The qualities and priorities that were present in the lives of the people of the early church created an environment for growth. They were a family and what they shared more than anything else was love.

The book of 1 John describes this kind of fellowship. So let's hear the words of 1 John 1 verse 3. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, it says, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. So there, John is telling his readers everything he knows about the sacrificial love of Jesus.

He does this because he also wants his hearers to have the same kind of relationship with God, with Jesus, and with each other. So the power of this community finds its origin in the fellowship that is shared with God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

There's a special relationship, fellowship, and community there. The second thing that people outside God's family saw that was attractive was that the family of God meets each other's needs.

[20:06] The other thing that was attractive about the early church was the fact that they were, as I said, meeting each other's needs. They were being honest and vulnerable with each other. They were sharing their struggles and their trials and their needs.

Then, they were not just saying, oh, that's really sad, oh, that's too bad for you. They were taking actual, active, intentional steps to meet those needs that they heard. They were serving as the physical presence of God in each other's lives.

They were being his hands and his feet. For any family to function in a healthy way, each individual must do their part to bring about this flourishing.

Now, think for a moment about your own families, families of origin, or the families you've married into. Are there people who don't show up, and I mean, participate, take action?

Are there people who don't do their part? Are there people who are quite happy to receive without giving? Think about all those faces for the next family reunion.

[21 : 19] But the community of faith that we exist in today is no different. We must be willing to meet the needs of those around us. because I think when we do that, it becomes attractive to other people.

Do other people want to be cared for? Yes. Do other people want to be seen? Yes. Valued? Yes.

So as you think about this church, your church, this could be a helpful thing to say to yourself.

This is my church. It is composed of people just like me. It will be friendly if I am.

It will do a great work if I work. It will make generous gifts to many causes if I am generous. It will bring others into this fellowship if I bring them.

It will be a church of loyalty and love, of faith and service.

[22 : 31] If I make it what it is, then I am filled with these things. Therefore, with God's help, I dedicate myself to the task of being the things that I want my church to be.

I have to confess, sometimes when I'm preaching, something resonates with me in my own heart, my own brain, and my own spirit, and I just go, wait a second, what? Isn't that amazing, though?

If we take ownership and we take action and responsibility for what it could be, we have a role in making it what it can be. When we're new, made new, and welcomed into the family of God, it's important to remind ourselves that this family is meant to continue to grow.

When we experience the love of the Father, we should be compelled to share it with the people who have never felt it before. Our world is lonely and sad and anxious.

So many things that we, as followers of Christ, can change for them by introducing them to the one who changed our lives. The Bible tells us that we are the light of the world.

[23 : 49] You know this. When we shine brightly through our words and actions, the world will, I promise you, the world will notice. Matthew 5, verse 16 says, In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

our good deeds become invitations. Become invitations to the fellowship and community and family that we have experienced through our faith in Jesus.

And now, we have the opportunity to make the space for others to come and join this family.

Matthew says that the response of those who see our acts of love will be to glorify our Father in heaven and perhaps become his children themselves.

Meals at my in-law's house were always interesting. Everyone was always welcome at their table.

They always had more chairs that they could bring from other parts of the house to make sure that everyone had a place to sit.

My in-laws treated everyone like family and everyone was and is welcome at their table. And there's always, as I said, room for more. Is the same true of us?

[25 : 20] Pastoral observation? Yes, I believe it is. What if we were known as the kind of people who wanted to add extra space at the table so that others could be part of the family, could be part of the fellowship and the celebration?

This is what the resurrection does in our lives, my friends. It makes us new and invites us into God's family ourselves so that we can invite others to join too.

Amen. Amen.