

Growing as a follower of Jesus... **in our Family**

[Please note these are unedited preaching notes and are not for publication. They are made available here to aid the deaf community in Christ Church and to be a reference for anyone who found the sermons useful.]

Getting going...

Last week Duncan invited us to join together in the journey of “*growing maturing disciples who are growing maturing disciples.*” Reflecting on this he challenged us to think about six distinct areas within the life of Jesus that are important to the life of Christ Church if we are to function the way God intended us to.

And over the next three weeks we want to think particularly about how we see Jesus integrating the sacred and the secular and how we can grow in this ourselves – in what has been called the ‘**incarnational**’ way of life. In other words where the ‘holy’ (our faith) meets all of the rest of our lives. Or better put: where the rubber hits the road! And tonight we are going to focus particularly on **Jesus’ response to the family.**

But I just want to say at the outset: I am very aware that these six areas of Jesus’ life are so inseparably integrated that in talking about ‘**incarnational living**’ we’re bound to touch on some of the other five areas. In other words don’t be surprised if you find the Spirit challenging you this evening about: PRAYING for your family; or about being HOLY within your family; or relying on the SPIRIT of God for your strength; or on the need to show COMPASSION for the needs of your family; or about how you share the GOOD NEWS with your family. They are ALL integrated together.

READING – *Luke 2:41-52*

A relationship with the Father

STORY OF RUTH

Two years ago Brenda and I took Ruth and new-born Nici with us to a church camp with a previous church we'd been at. Now there were 1,500 people on the camp – and half of them were children!

One morning at the main worship event of the day, JUST before everyone broke up to go to their groups, we let Ruth go and join the bun-fight of worshipping 2, 3 and 4 year olds jumping up and down at the front to the action songs. Every now and again we'd catch a glimpse of her in the crowd (of maybe sixty toddlers!). I remember feeling – *this is a safe place, our daughter is completely surrounded by Christians*. And after all – it was so lovely to see Ruth up there worshipping with the other children.

The song ended and the crowds began to scatter, and as the toddler bundle in the front dispersed – from the place we were sitting just a few rows back – we completely lost sight of Ruth!

We searched the fast-emptying venue and then the search party grew and spread its wings throughout the camp. They put a lock-down on the front gate – but the village was vast and the exits were many. I remember my feelings of safety and security turning into feelings of fear, anxiety, desperation, and imagining the worst (I do have a vivid imagination!). We searched and searched and after about fifteen minutes of hunting high and low (it felt like FOREVER) Ruth turned up safe in the arms of another parent who'd seen her wondering down the road alone.

You can imagine the massive relief and the joy – but I think some of the first words out were more like anguished expressions of *'How could you do this to us?'* and *'What were you thinking?!*

But the funny thing about it is that Ruth was perfectly happy and content. She just went for a stroll to explore. She hadn't even stopped to think: *Where are my mummy and daddy?* Not a tear was shed (by her!). The look on her face said it all: *What were you worried about? Didn't you know I'd be fine? Jesus is looking after me!*

I was reflecting on the parallels between Brenda and my experience of losing Ruth and that of Joseph and Mary losing Jesus (also in the place of worship):

He's in safe hands. He'll be fine... He's gone! He could have been abducted or killed!... He's found! HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO US?! Didn't you know I'd be in my Father's house?

I wanted to start in this place – the **FIRST WORDS OF JESUS** that we hear him speak. It's the part of the story that you may have heard many times before. It is here that we see the priority in any family relationships that are going to flow out of being followers of Christ. "**DID YOU NOT KNOW THAT I MUST BE IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE?**"

There are two things about that: **FIRST** – that Jesus knew who he was, he knew his identity as the son of the Father; **SECOND** – Jesus knew that **THE MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP OF ALL** was the relationship with his heavenly Father. Jesus priority was a relationship with His Father – we see that again and again in his life and ministry.

Now unless you and I take this reality on board – the rest is completely superfluous. **We cannot respond to our families with the love of God unless we have first known and experienced the love of God for ourselves.**

The way that Jesus responded to his family (*IN FACT the way that Jesus responded to ALL situations he faced*) flowed directly out of having a very real, intimate and transforming relationship with **Abba** – with God his Father.

Especially out of this relationship with his Father in Heaven, flowed two things: **Obedience** to God; and **Serving** our families.

These things apply to family relationships – whether you're thinking of your parents, your children, your siblings, your spouse, or even your grandparents or grandchildren. I want to encourage you whether you're in a good place in your family at the moment – or even if you're really struggling.

1) So FIRSTLY, flowing out of his relationship with the Father, Jesus was obedient to his Father's will (Lk.2:51 & Eph.6:1-4)

It won't come as a surprise to you that Jesus was a Jew – part of a normal Jewish family. And it was normal Jewish custom to attend Passover in Jerusalem each year, one of three important festivals for which families would travel to Jerusalem (*Deut. 16:16*). So the passage we just read starts with that reminder:

41-42 "Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual."

Mary and Joseph were doing what they did every year. It's a glimpse into the life of the youngster, Jesus – the 12 year old who was already learning what it meant to obey the Law by following, or obeying, his parents.

Jesus obeyed God by...

1. Submitting to his family

Submitting = literally means to put yourself under someone else; ie. to accept, yield or surrender to another person.

It is about surrendering my will, pride, ego and seeing the other person as more important than yourself. This morning Jeremy Clampett read a passage from Romans which says: *"Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought."*

Looking at Jesus, we read:

51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.

Even though Jesus knew his real Father, he did not reject his earthly parents but went back to Nazareth with them and lived under their authority for another 18 years.

You see – Jesus didn't see the onset of wisdom as a chance to suddenly up and walk out on his family. No, commitment to God is never an excuse for neglecting our responsibility to family relationships.

Here's what Paul says about our family relationships:

(Msg) ¹⁻⁴Children, do what your parents tell you. This is only right. "Honor your father and mother" is the first commandment that has a promise attached to it, namely, "so you will live well and have a long life." Fathers, don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.

- It is only right while you are living under your parent's roof to accept and respect their wishes. Of course once you move away and as you grow up you grow in independence and don't live under a set of rules in the same way. But you are able to take the framework of what you have learnt and build your own household.
- And when you are married – its not appropriate to differ first to your parents – your marriage holds greater importance. Paul urges married couples to submit to one another – out of love for one another. But we do not cease to honour our parents.
- Parents – there is this warning to love your children – to not exasperate them or come down hard on them.
- I know there are times when I can get really really frustrated with my daughters – and I am so aware that if I let my anger loose and don't channel it – there is the danger of hurting them, crushing their spirits.
- Paul urges us to take them by the hand and lead them in the way of Jesus. Its the caring and compassionate way.

2. *Jesus obeyed God by...* **honouring his family**

One of the dictionary definitions of honour is 'to respect.'

Again – I want to refer to this morning when Jeremy talked about what it means to 'respect': *It's helping the other person to be their best.*

It means actively looking for opportunities to build them up and encourage them – to help to bring out the best in them.

I want to ask you – if the Son of God obeyed and honoured **his** human parents, how much more should we learn what it is to honour our family members?

How do we honour our families? And how do we honour them when they're difficult?

3. *Thirdly, Jesus obeyed God by...* **learning to live through the struggles**

I just want to say that the challenging family relationships, it may be the distance between you geographically or emotionally, THESE relationships are opportunities to really grow in grace.

Because its in these relationships that we can find opportunities to serve our families and reach out to them – when even sometimes that's the last thing we want to do.

2) SECONDLY, flowing out of his relationship with the Father, Jesus Served His Family (Jn. 19:26, Jn. 15:12-13 & Jn.20:28)

Statistics: I read this week that in South Africa:

- 85% of children with behavioural disorders are from fatherless homes;
- 71% of those who drop out of high school are also from fatherless homes;
- And 85% of the youth sitting in SA prisons grew up in fatherless homes.

Do you think there may be a battle on over family life in our nation?

It is through one of the greatest struggles of Jesus' life – nailed to the cross at Calvary – that we see one of Jesus' finest moments of caring for and serving his family:

²⁶*When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son,"*
²⁷*and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

We read in John's Gospel:

²⁸ *"...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

So what does it mean to SERVE our families?

1. **Creatively seeking out their needs.** Having submitted to another person it becomes our desire to serve them. We see them as someone whose needs are greater than our own.

This means that if you see a need in the home you don't leave it for someone else to do, but see it as an opportunity to serve others. Whether its cleaning up a mess, or taking out the dog. Or it could be just cutting each other some slack when emotions are running high and everyone's tired and busy.

Sometimes the need is actually **letting them go**. Jesus was on the brink between boy and manhood (12 years old was the age of maturing in Jewish culture). It must have been hard for Mary to start to let go.

When Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem in search of Jesus – they were looking for a boy – but they found a young wise man. There is something both **painful** and **sweet** about letting go.

If you're not living with your siblings any more - perhaps right now the best thing you could do for your brother or sister is to just give them a call to say: *'Hi, how're you doing?'* Initiating the relationship and not waiting for them.

2. **Praying for them.** Essential to Jesus life was **praying** for those he encountered. Praying for your family makes a difference. First prize is to pray WITH them. Look out for their needs and ask them: *can I pray for you in that?* Or if they're not up to that – make time to pray for your parents, or children, or your siblings when you're praying.

3. **Sharing your faith with them.** Example of Timothy (godly parenting!) – Paul describes Tim as having *“the faith of your mother Eunice and your grandmother Louis.”*

4. **Spending time together.**

The greatest gift we can give to our families is our time. To spend time together.

GILLY: A friend of ours has just left her husband and two and four year old children behind in the UK for a week so that she can be in Cape Town to support and help her sister who has just given birth to a second child. I said to her last week – do you know that this gift of time that you are giving your sister is far greater than anything you could buy for her with money.

- *Story of Tony Campolo*
(from 'Things we wish we had Said' – by Tony and Bart Campolo)
I talked recently with a young married couple. The husband is a really great Christian guy, but he is not handling this problem of balancing well at all. He is very involved in missionary service and is the driving force behind an incredible work for God. His ministry has him on the road constantly. He is not paying much attention to his wife or his two sons. His wife loves him and thinks that what he is doing is wonderful, but

she, nevertheless, feels neglected. She has silently and sadly resigned herself to a kind of married life that has left her lonely and disappointed. She has figured out how to make the best of her lot, and she is doing quite well, considering the overall situation. This young woman has learned to live with the hurt that goes with the awareness that her husband's work is his primary concern and that she must settle for whatever time is left over.

Something inside her is dying, and I hope that htis guy doesn't wake up too late to what he is doing to her.

I did my best to tell him how I saw his situation, but I had the feeling that he didn't intend to be the one doing any adjusting.

This particular man has also neglected his two boys, who are seven and fourtee. Like their mother, the boys think that their dad is the neatest thing that ever came down the pike. But also like their mom, they sense that they are not very important in the grand scheme of things as far as their father is concerned.

This man knows better, but he can come up with a thousand justifications as to why he doesn't have more time for his family. B ecause his work is so noble, his wife and kids are made to feel guilty if they ever suggest that he do less of it and give more time to them. He's not balancing life well at all.

(Campolo then admits to his son, Bart...) In retrospect, I know I failed to take the biblical concept of the Sabbath seriously. The Bible teaches that one day each week should be set aside from all labour and should be spent with the family in spiritual renewal. Every family, according to the teachings of Scripture, should have a day each week to nurture relationships with one another and with the Lord. If Sunday is a workday, which it always has been for me, then another day should be set aside for this purpose. The particular day of the week that is observed as the Sabbath is not what is important; what is important is that we recognise that our observing such a day is a commandment of God.

If I had it to do over again, I would make one day a week a family day and have us all spend it together doing something fun and special. Doing that would have enabled me to balance life better and to be a better father.

If you don't already, what about having a 'family night' – an evening where you especially are all there and eat together or spend the evening 'out' together.

Perhaps each member of the family could take it in turns to suggest what you do on a 'family night.'

In Closing...

I was inspired by Bill Hybels book 'Holy Discontent' in which he talks about being stirred by a Godly dissatisfaction, or a 'holy discontent', about the way things are. In fact stirred so much that you are drawn to make a difference and do something about it.

Don't allow the size of the hill or the depth of your family problems to get you down. The 'discontent' part of your 'holy discontent' doesn't have to discourage or depress you if you allow yourself to be an instrument in God's hand. This is one of the greatest opportunities to let Jesus affect your family relationships.

Gandhi: "Be the difference you want to see..." in your family.

Jesus: "You are the salt of the earth." So be salt in your family.

Prayer

- i. To FIRST know and experience the love of the Father;
- ii. Healing/restoration of family relationships;
- iii. Strength and wisdom to make right decisions in the coming days/weeks.