

Sermon- When Family Logic Collides with Spiritual Logic

Scripture: John 7:1-9

Sunday, May 13, 2018

Couple years ago I began preaching through the Gospel of John. John is fascinating because it is both a record of eye witness testimony about Jesus and also deep theological reflection even in the structure of the narrative. That is why when people want to discredit Jesus, the first thing they do is dismiss the Gospel of John. On the other hand if you really want to understand who Jesus is, John is one of the best places to start. That is why I have chosen to preach through this book. If you want to refer to any previous sermon preached, you will find the text and almost all the audio available online at argentinemennonite.org

Let's get into our text for today. We are going to look at Jesus' interaction with his brothers in chapter 7, but to understand it better, let me do a quick summary of the shape of Jesus ministry in John to this point. When Jesus started his ministry, he selects 12 disciples, teaches them about the kingdom of God, sends them on a mission trip with the power to heal in his name. The disciples are actually surprised by the power of Jesus name and the healing they could accomplish with it. So are the people they ministered to. And it works so well that the people are really hungry to go directly to the source of this power and so they come looking for Jesus. So when the disciples regathered to debrief their master, before long around them are 12,000 people including 5000 men. So Jesus teaches all these people on the hills North West shore of the Sea of Galilee. There Jesus not only teaches them but also feeds all 12,000 of them a bounteous meal with 5 loaves and two fish. As you can imagine the people go crazy and want to make Jesus King right there. Jesus of course knows that a coronation at this time is not part of his plan but focuses on his hardest teachings. When the people hear Jesus talking about them having to drink his blood and eat his flesh to have eternal life, they don't bother to

understand the metaphor. They are in fact very offended and decide to drop Jesus from their life plan. So in the end, the 12,000 disappear and Jesus is left with the 12. So when you look at the action just in chapter 6, within just this chapter we see Jesus followers multiply by a 1000 and also shrink by a 1000 times. When your group is increasing you look very good in everybody's eyes. When your group shrinks you look like a failure. At the end of chapter 6 Jesus was in a valley as far as worldly success goes.

It is at this valley in Jesus' life that we find him at the beginning of chapter 7, surrounded by his biological siblings. And they have a very interesting exchange. Jesus brothers look at Jesus' situation, analyse his "failure" and are ready to give him advice. Now before we go into the details of this exchange in honor of Mother's Day, I just want to point out that Jesus mother was not part of this exchange. We don't know however if she was present. She may or may not have been. But at this point Jesus' brothers are a bunch of clueless unbelievers. His mother is not included in that. Jesus' mother had an inside track on God's plan through Jesus and I just want to acknowledge that whatever God did in this world through Jesus, he enlisted the cooperation of Jesus' mother and that is I think an honor to the whole institution of motherhood. We should be most grateful to our mothers. OK, but let's get back to the rest of his family.

Ok so our passage for today is actually not about Jesus' mother but about his exchange with his brothers. Remember, this was a low point in Jesus' life. He had just got dumped by 12,000 people. It is also just before the Feast of Booths. This was the third of the 3 most important Jewish Festivals, the other two being the Passover, and festival of Weeks. This would be approximately between mid September and mid October. This was also one of three times where the Jews would travel to Judea to celebrate at the temple. So just before the Feast of Booths, Jesus is hanging out with his brothers. Now you have to imagine growing up in a house where Jesus was literally the eldest brother. And he was sinless. And his brothers had the sin nature that the rest of humanity possessed. Can you imagine the dynamic there? Talk about a hard act to follow and all

the jealousy and resentment his brothers may have had towards Jesus. I am sure Jesus parents would have done their best to treat all of them the same but how could they when they knew that Jesus was born a miracle baby who was attended to by a special star in the sky, his own halleluia chorus in heaven and kings who traveled all the way from Persia. You think that would not affect the way Jesus was treated and you think his brothers would have not picked up on it? You can be sure they did. And you can be sure that that jealousy made his brothers particularly skeptical about Jesus. But family is family. And one thing family members usually do is look at your situation, analyze it and tell you what you should be doing with your life, right?

And that is exactly what his brothers were doing that day. They look at Jesus' situation, conclude that his problem is that he has lost all his followers. They see a big festival coming which will draw most of the Jewish population to one location. So they think they have found a solution to all of Jesus' problems. They tell Jesus, so you can do these big miracles, right? So why don't you go to Judea and do your big miracles where all your followers can see you. There, it is that simple. Do that and you will be famous. You can't be famous if you are going to hide here like this, right? And you can almost hear the sarcasm in their voice. But also can you hear the parallels to what the crowds were telling Jesus to do and even the Pharisees. Everywhere that Jesus went, people were asking him to perform miracles prove himself to them or meet some need of theirs. Can you imagine how tiresome it would have been for Jesus to keep hearing that from everywhere? It was almost like everybody was treating him like some performing bear. And then he goes home and his own brothers were doing the same thing. Any ordinary human being would have snapped. But not Jesus.

What does Jesus do? Jesus does not tell them that they are wrong. He does not tell them their analysis is deficient. Jesus handles this conversation with great wisdom and gentleness. You see, Jesus quietly presents to his brothers an aspect of his own situation that his brothers had completely failed to consider. That is, that in his role as prophet,

his task was to boldly point out evil where ever he saw it in society. And because he pointed out evil that he faced this opposition in this world. And Jesus had to take this opposition into account in everything he did including when he went to Jerusalem. Unlike his brothers of course who faced no opposition or security risks and could go anytime they wanted to. This argument was very compelling. It convinced Jesus' brothers and as a result they proceed to Jerusalem without him.

But I cannot conclude this here without peeking at what comes after this, in the very next versus. Because after making a point to tell his brothers that his time to go to Judea had not yet come, we actually find Jesus, doing exactly that. He was going to Jerusalem but in disguise so that no one knew he was there. I want to point out here, that when you look at our passage again, what you realize is that Jesus' brothers analysis, while incomplete was not all wrong. It did make sense for Jesus to be where all the people were and do whatever he did in the midst of the crowds. But the point that Jesus was making is that the "when" and "how" matters as much as the "what". Because if Jesus had travelled with his brothers, he would not be able to travel incognito. And if he did not travel incognito, he could have been arrested by the authorities before he had finished his teaching and prepared his disciples. Timing is extremely important. Doing the right thing at the wrong time can mess up everything right? Whether it is doing a particular job or visiting a person or attending a wedding or funeral or even sharing the Gospel, doing these things at the right time and in the right way is as important as the act itself. There is another thing about timing we see here that I think is important. When you look at Jesus situation, his brothers with their very human thinking were actually able to analyse and figure out "what" the right thing to do was. But it took looking at it from a spiritual perspective to figure out the "when". And you can contain almost all of life in from birth to death and everything that comes in between. You can decide to have a baby, but God decides the when. You can decide to get married, but really you should be waiting on God's timing. I know people who say I am ready to die.

But God says, I am going to take you when I take you. You do not get to decide that. And when it comes life in between, too we can see the difference in perspectives between us and God. When we ask God for something, we want it now. God tells us that we need to wait. On the other hand, when we need to do something for God, the tables are usually turned. We tell God that we want to wait. It can be about calling someone, or sharing your faith or confessing and repenting of a sin. In those situations, we want to put it off till later, when God wants us to act now while it is still day light and the opportunity is still open. Even in those situations we usually know what to do, it is the timing that we get messed up. But timing is everything and if you look at Jesus, he was very conscious of moving at the timing of his heavenly father in everything that he did.

The third thing I want to point out here is that because Jesus handled his family with tremendous gentleness and wisdom, the end result is that they too become believers. James, Jesus' brother even gets his own book in the Bible. And yes it is short. Just 5 chapters, but does pack a tremendous punch. Because Jesus handled his family with care the end result was that his own brothers became some of the most powerful evangelists and leaders in the first generation of the church.

So how do we apply the way Jesus handles his brothers in our own life. Well, I think it is important for us to recognize that our families are one of the most important mission fields we will ever have. Other people come and go, but we can never walk away from our parents or our children as long as they are alive. The Bible is very clear about parents responsibility in sharing our faith to our children. We may not live close to our siblings but we remain in contact with our siblings our whole lives.

But because of proximity and duration of our family relationships, it raises both unique opportunities and particular challenges. When my International students come to Christ, I remind them that they are the best evangelists to their parents. Nobody has access to their parents like they do. And nobody known them like their own children. Now this

intimate knowledge of course goes both ways and can be both a good thing and a bad thing, right? Because we also take family for granted more than anybody else. Our guard is usually always down when it comes to family. I can be extremely patient with acquaintances. But when it comes to my own children, and even my mom, I can be quick to snap at them. Anybody here can relate to that? Given that, sharing the Gospel with your family can be the most difficult task you will ever do. Even Jesus said, a prophet is not recognized in his home town, right? And he was sinless. So imagine how hard it is for a flawed vessel like ourselves, when we have to share the Gospel to those who are most acquainted with our flaws. Sharing the Gospel with family can also be the toughest thing that you do.

Yet, when someone in our family comes to Christ, it is such a powerful thing. It takes the level of intimacy you can have with them to a whole new level. You can have conversations with them that you cannot have with others. Imagine having a kindred spirit in your own family. It is when your biological relationship overlaps with the spiritual. And the best thing is that every spiritual relationship does not end with physical death. Every spiritual relationship is an eternal relationship. So if you really love your family, sharing the Gospel with them opens the possibility of never losing them for all eternity.

Friends, intimacy, I believe is one of the most beautiful forms of testimony there is. My prayer is that you will be able to not just have an intimate and eternal relationship with our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, but that, that intimacy extends to all of your family as well, parents, children, siblings and spouses. May with joy be for us all. Let us pray.