

Year B, June 10, 2018
3 Pentecost (Proper 5)
Christ Church, Mexia

I've heard it said that home is where you go when you're tired of being nice! What do you think? I've also heard it said that you don't get to pick your family, but you get to pick your friends. I believe that the author Harper Lee is often credited with this sentiment.

Anyway, let me tell you a story that appeared in *The Hope Health Letter* years ago: "Once upon a time, there was a man who lived with his wife, two small children, and his elderly parents in a tiny hut. He tried to be patient and gracious, but the noise and crowded conditions wore him down.

In desperation, he consulted the village wise man. 'Do you have a rooster?' asked the wise man. 'Yes,' he replied. Keep the rooster in the hut with your family and come see me again next week. The next week the man returned and told the wise man that living conditions were worse than ever, with the rooster crowing and making a mess of the hut.

'Do you have a cow?' asked the wise leader. The man nodded fearfully. 'Take your cow into the hut as well and come see me in a week.' Over the next several weeks, the man – on advice of the wise elder – made room for a goat, two dogs, and his brother's children.

Finally, he could take no more, and in a fit of anger, kicked out all the animals and guests, leaving only his wife, his children, and his parents. The home suddenly became spacious and quiet, and everyone lived happily ever after."

Well, change and other things may make us appreciate what we have more than we already do. Maybe just changing our perception. For example, Bishop Desmond Tutu has a different saying about family: "You don't get to choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them." God's gift – how often do we NOT look at some family members in that way?

Most of us tend to think of our family as blood relations and in-laws who enter by marriage – like those who would fit on the family tree drawn by a genealogist. But Jesus extends our outlook somewhat today. These are not the only people who are our family according to Jesus. Whoever does the will of God, and I presume those who love God, are also our brothers, sisters, parents, etc. Now that's a large family – that you don't get to choose. What might that look like?

Simon Reading, writing for *The Salt Collective*, explains it this way: "It was at my church in Istanbul, Turkey that God as the great unifier was most in evidence. Here, among an eclectic missionary contingent, a nascent group of Turkish believers and a multicultural congregation of travelers and refugees, a community (dare I say family?) was formed that spanned all the many cracks and fissures between theology, dogma and tradition. In some services newborns were baptized, while those who held to 'believer's baptism' held their tongues and celebrated a new member in their community (family). In other services drums, guitars, and raised hands typified the worship style, while those more comfortable with the organ and stoicism worked hard to embrace a more dynamic and contemporary mode, for the benefit of younger members. Equally, the young participated in liturgy and very structured meetings, knowing that this is what aided others in their relationship to God. I worshipped with people who sought the 'gifts of the spirit' and those who thought said 'gifts' were tricks of the devil. I took communion with Calvinists and Armenians. I attended youth groups with Universalists and those who believe in an 'Elect.'"

How does that sound? Is there a way for a community, a family, to incorporate such diversity? That would be the goal – that we all may be one. But Reading goes on to note the difficulty of sustaining such inclusiveness and richness of experience, particularly as the numbers of people increase. As the family grows, so to speak, the need for acceptance, tolerance, compassion, and love becomes even greater. It is necessary to avoid becoming the "true believer" – the ones who have THE way, THE knowledge, THE truth.

The Rev. Danae Ashley explains the gospel passage this way:

"When Jesus declared, 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother,' it challenged the Jewish culture around him. No longer are you close to God because you were born into a Jewish household; no longer do you just take care of your own kind; instead, your family is being extended to anyone who does the will of God." - or at least tries. ... "Today, it challenges us to look beyond our walls, our denominational lines, our socio-economic status, and our faith to see our brothers and sisters and mothers. God calls us to expand our family in ways that are just as shocking as it was to the Gospel of Mark's first-century audience."

Therefore, I think we need to adopt the stance of Bishop Tutu – they are all a gift from God, a gift we should welcome and accept – a gift

to be treated with dignity and respect. And to do so, we need to look for common ground, not differences.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.