

Sabbath in Family
Ruth 1: 1-16
Luke 10: 38-42
July 22, 2007

The Rev. Patrick Day
First Presbyterian Church Lake Forest
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I love my family. Katie and I have three children, a seven year old, a four year old and another four year old and there is not a shrinking violet in the crowd. It is a circus at our house. I remember being at the park district one day, seeing a mother sitting with her child, the two of them reading a book as the child ate cheerios one by one. We are more of a wind-sprint up and down the hall kind of crowd. I love them. I would not change a thing.

I love the family I grew up with. I have an older brother and older sister. We moved around a lot when we were young so we relied on each other a good bit. The exception, I guess, was the continued reality that my brother spent the majority of our up bringing trying to kill me. It seems most every family picture we have shows my brother trying take me out of the picture. Here we are at the Grand Canyon, and there's my brother trying to push me over the rail. Here we are at Universal Studios, and here's my brother trying to feed me to the mechanical shark at the Jaws exhibit. I figured most of this was the usual sibling kind of stuff, so I would defend myself and go on about it as business as usual; until I became increasingly suspicious that my parents were in on it.

Case-in-point: we take a trip out west, we visit some touristy ghost towns and everybody gets a cowboy hat. Then my parents also bought me a cork gun that looked like old west gun. You put the cork in barrel, pump it up and pull the trigger. You didn't have to worry about loosing the cork because it was tied to the barrel, so it would only shoot out about a foot and half away. They bought my brother a bull whip. They told him "remember, don't whip your brother." This is what my brother heard: "whip your brother." He's casing me around the camp grounds like Indiana Jones while I'm trying to defend myself with a cork gun; where, again, the cork is tied to the barrel.

I love my family, I do, but they are not the point. They are not the point of what we read this day. Family is great. I have read the Bible, and just like my family isn't perfect, I haven't found any family in that book that is. I have yet to find the story in the Bible of the happily married mother and father with two beautiful children all with perfect teeth and a well behaved dog who has equally perfect teeth. It is not in there. God knows that families are messy, they are tricky, and each operates in its own way.

Our Old Testament this morning, our brief Old Testament passage this morning, Ruth stays with her mother-in-law. Her husband has died, her mother-in-law is from another land and tells her that she needs to go back with her people and that she'll go back with her. Ruth says no, from now on I go where you go; your people will be my people. That is the kind of family we find.

Our New Testament story, I love this story, I love Martha. Jesus goes to visit Mary and Martha; he's tired and wants to rest. Martha decides that she will take care of him so she begins cooking and cleaning and making sure that his every need is taken care of. She sees Mary sitting there, doing nothing. Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to get up and give her a hand. Jesus

never does what we expect. Instead of telling Mary to get up and help Martha, he tells Martha that she has it all wrong; he just wants to sit there, and wants her to sit there and be with him.

Jesus stopped at their house on his way to Jerusalem. Jesus knew that he was going to die, and I'm sure that weighed pretty heavily on his mind. The perfect seven course meal was not what he needed. He wanted to be with his family. As you may know, Mary and Martha were not relatives of his, but just two chapters earlier in this gospel Jesus is sitting with a crowd of people and one of his disciples comes up and says, "your mother and brothers are here and they want to speak with you."

Jesus replied, "Who are my mother and brothers? Anyone who hears the word of God and puts it into practice, they are my mother and my brothers."

Is Jesus saying here that family does not matter? Does he completely disregard his mother and his brothers? No. One of the last things that Jesus does while he is hanging on the cross is to make sure that his mother is taken care of. It is not about diminishing the roll of the physical, blood related family. It is about lifting up the family of faith, helping us to see that each of us is connect to each other whether we share a name or any family history or not. It is the family of faith that Jesus lifts up. And so he comes to these sisters' house and he regards them as family, he is on his way to face his trial and his own execution. What he wants is to be with his family. The clanging in the kitchen, the noise of stoking the fire and getting everything ready is not what Jesus needs. Martha with the best of intentions has it all wrong. In verse 40 is says Martha was distracted by all the tasks. By all outward appearances she was the only one doing anything, but she was the one who was distracting, because, again by all outward appearances Mary was not doing anything. But she was, she was not just sitting there, she was sitting there with Christ, listening to what he had to say. What Jesus needed at that moment was not the perfect meal. What Jesus needed at that point was to be surrounded by people that he loved and the people who loved him. That is what happens in this family of faith. When you truly connect with other people here, you surround yourself with the love that comes from Christ, Jesus.

Something else happens too, it is priorities. This story is not so much about family as it is about priorities. Jesus says to Martha that Mary has chosen the better part. We read that Martha was distracted, it is priorities. Martha needs to set down the dishes and to sit down and listen. That is what this family of faith can do for each of us. When we come together, when we begin to connect with each other, we have people around us who can help us realign our priorities. We have people around us who can help us free ourselves from those other distractions and to focus on the gospel.

Mark Devries, a good Presbyterian from Tennessee, wrote a book called Family-Based Youth Ministry. He wrote: our connective-ness to the community of faith is the very thing that should hold us accountable for our faithfulness to family, work, and church.

It is not about diminishing the roll of family, but it is about rising up that family of faith that can help us stay focus on what truly is important. It is our family of faith that can impact the way we live with our families, it can impact the way we live in our work. Our relationships within the family of faith that guide us in the way we work here. We can keep you busy; if you want to stay busy see me after worship we have a thousand opportunities for you to stay busy.

Unless you are connected at a level like Christ is talking about and calling us to and sitting with each other, then that busyness is just that, busyness. Family of faith.

There is a group of men who come together every Friday morning to read and to study the bible and to throw around some good hearted heresy every now and again. We pray together, with each other, for each other and we pray for others. For the last two years my mother-in-law has been battling cancer, men at that bible study know more about my mother-in-law's condition than some of my family does. There are people here who pray, they are part of the prayer chain that is there ministry. They know what is going on with my mother-in-law more than my family does. It is the family of faith.

I pray that you feel that connection here. I pray that if you don't, you will take steps to find that connection. We will do our best to reach out. We have opportunities already here. We have small groups that will be rolling out this fall. We will do our best to reach out, but what we will not do is kick in your front door and tell you that you will now be connected. You will need to take that step. I pray that you will, because once you do, once you feel that connection, once you are in touch with that gospel everything else in your life begins to take a different shape. It is not a quick fix, but that gospel and that connection to this family will help you begin to see things a little differently. I pray that you already feel that, and if you don't I pray that you will. It is a tremendously powerful thing.

Amen.