

Proper 7-A

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Christ Church and San Marcos, Tarrytown

It's hard for me to believe that people associate family values with Christian faith when Jesus, its founder, went around saying things like this: "For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me." That does not sound much like a family values point-of-view.

But look more deeply. It is not that Jesus is anti-family. It is that Jesus does not suffer from a narrow view of what family means. Take the third chapter in the Gospel of Mark, for example. There Mark tells a story about an occasion when the mother and brothers of Jesus came to visit him. Jesus was not thrilled. He replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" My mother would not have been too happy with that response, and it leaves Jesus looking not at all family-oriented. But then he goes on. "Looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'"

It is not at all that Jesus is opposed to family. It is that he sees family in a broader way than many do. Jesus saw family in a broader way than those who came to him and said, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." Pay attention carefully. On the one hand—your mother and brothers and sisters are outside. Jesus then looked and spoke to those who sat around him — "Here are my mother and my brothers." The distinction is between a narrow view of family that stays outside the circle, that defines who is in and who is out and a view of family that looks around at who has chosen

to come inside. The Jesus family does not draw lines between in and out. The Jesus family invites all to come in.

There is one other passage to take note of, perhaps the most important passage in all of the Gospel—the death of Jesus on a cross. And from the cross, once again, Jesus dealt with family concerns.

It is hardly that Jesus was unconcerned with family life. It is that Jesus was so concerned with the life of family and its importance to individual well-being that he created a new family from the cross, one that had not existed before, and one that the law made no provision for existing.

From the cross, Jesus looked down on two people in particular. One was his mother. She was a widow, no longer able to look to her oldest son for support. By her side was John, Jesus' closest disciple, the one he knew who would bear the grief of his death with the greatest hardship. Jesus, breathing his last breaths, takes time to create a family that neither biology nor law could create.

In his final moments, he takes his widowed mother without obvious means of support and makes John her son. "Woman, behold your son," he said. And he turns to John and makes Mary John's own mother. "Behold your mother." And it is so.

A family that did not previously exist has come to be. A family that is born of grace, not law; not of flesh and blood, but of the Spirit.

Jesus is not anti-family. He is so pro-family that he defines it beyond the bounds of human expectation. What makes family family for Jesus is not accidents of birth. What makes family family in the Gospel is choice. What makes family family in the Gospel is grace. What makes family family is the grace and mystery of Baptism. The only blood that makes family family is not ours. It is Jesus'. Amen.

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