

“What Does a Christian Family Look Like Anyway?” Matthew 7: 9-11; Mark 3:19b-21, 31-35

We’ve already done a lot of things honoring mothers and Mother’s Day today. People all over the whole country are celebrating Mother’s Day today. However, there is still a different way to look at today—the United Methodist Church also calls today “The Festival of the Christian Home.”

I like that, too. How about you? I like it because we all get included. Not all of us are mothers, as we just found out with our song requests. Not all of us still have mothers. Some of us have had ad experiences with the topic of motherhood—maybe fertility problems, or something in our childhood or later on in our lives.

In fact, I have read that some Christian people deliberately stay home from church on Mother’s Day, if they are in such an extremely difficult situation.

But, all of us can have a Christian home, if we have a home at all. And a Christian home is one of the very best blessings there is in this world.

A Christian home is a home where at least one Christian lives. Simple.

A Christian family can be a little harder to define, and achieve.

Families can be difficult. No, I am probably the only one who thinks that.

The very first family of all, with Adam and Eve as the parents, and Cain and Abel as the sons . . . well, they had big problems of jealousy in that family. Cain was so jealous of Abel that he killed him, his own brother.

I found an ancient document that has survived, a school report on Cain (actually written by Richard Lederer:

“Cain does not play well with others and has turned out to be a discipline problem. We have been willing to overlook some of his aggressive tendencies, but killing one quarter of the earth’s population goes beyond what we are able to tolerate.”

So, when God gave the Ten Commandments, two of them were about family life:

Honor your father and mother.

Thou shalt not kill.

Well, there are all sorts of family problems in the Bible: jealousy, revenge, trickery, deceit, violence. The people of the Bible were faulty human beings, just as we are. Some of their stories are meant to teach us what not to do.

However, in God’s great mercy and wisdom, we’ve been created by God to have paternal and maternal instincts—protective, nurturing instincts toward children, our own and all children. Those things are built right into us, thanks be to God. Jesus referred to them in the verses from Matthew. Because of our instincts, even if we are bad, we will not give our hungry children rocks, or snakes.

It is up to all of us to cultivate these qualities, and do our best by the children that come our way.

It would be nice if the New Testament gave us lots of examples of Christian families and homes, but the thing is, Christianity was very new when it was written. There are a few guidelines, but not too many.

Still, we can figure it out, how to have a Christian home, a Christian family.

First off, be Christians! Believe in Jesus, go to church for worship, live out your lives with the Christian values of honesty, fairness, kindness, mercy, and love. And of course, it is up to the adults in the family to set the tone.

Then there are the responsibilities of the adults; besides being committed Christians, they have to provide for and nurture the children.

And children, especially babies and small children need a lot of these! An infant is completely dependent on his or her parents for food and protection.

And as Jean Kerr once said, once you have a baby, you have it . . . around. It will be years before that child can be distracted from any elemental need by saying, "Oh, for heaven's sake, go look at television!"

Being a parent is also being a teacher—a teacher of words, ideas, customs, and a lot of how-to.

Throughout time, there have been some dreadful distortions of parenting, and they do need correcting.

There is the ownership version of parenthood—it's my kid, I'll do whatever I want—no matter how bad.

There's the "rescue helicopter" version—I will save this child from anything and everything bad in the world.

There's the "happiness through possessions" version, with more toys and more stuff adding up to a great childhood. Not necessarily, you have to give a kid a place to sleep without being crowded out by stuff.

There's even the "my child can do no wrong, even if it is on videotape" version.

No, these are not realistic, much less helpful ways to raise kids, especially in the world where we live.

The thing about a Christian home and family is that it can go beyond blood relationship. What Jesus said in the Scripture from Mark was very pertinent to this.

His mother and brothers had come to check on him. Maybe Mary had brought him some of her famous chicken soup. My Bible footnotes say that "perhaps his mother and his brothers were concerned both for his safety, amidst the intense emotions rising round him, and his sanity." They couldn't even eat, for pity's sake! And you know how mothers worry about that!

Jesus' message back to them was "Who are my mother and my brothers? Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Jesus was making a very important point, even though it probably bothered his mother. Having the Christian faith in common makes us family—whether we are related by blood or marriage or adoption or not.

We, in this church, and with all churches everywhere are family. We are all brothers and sisters, within Jesus' family.

It can be turned the other way, too. We don't depend only on bloodlines to be a family in a home. Just think of that lady in the video, with twenty-two children, nineteen of whom she adopted, some from another country, no less. That's quite a family!

There are all sorts of categories for families, not just Mom and Dad and 2.5 kids.

I'm a case in point. I have step-brothers. I have a half-uncle, and we have never worried which half.

Lots of us have steps and halves and in-laws and out-laws. Those categories don't have to be that important.

The important thing is that we all "do the will of God." We worship God. We treat one another with kindness. We look after those who need looking after; the young, the old, the sick, the needy.

Maybe the best way to describe a Christian home and family is in our Book of Worship. At the end of the wedding ceremony, the new couple is told this:

God the Eternal keep you in love with each other.
So that the peace of Christ may abide in your home.
God to serve God and your neighbor in all that you do.

And here is a prayer by Ruth Duck. Let's bow our heads and close the sermon with this prayer.

In you, O God, every family on earth receives its name.
Illumine the homes of this earth with the light of your love,
granting courage to those who are hurt or lonely,
endurance to those who care for sick family members,
and wisdom to those in fearful times of change.
We thank you for gifts of love we have received
from mother, father, spouse, child, or companion.
As we have been loved by you and by others, so may we love.
Grant us your peace, through Jesus the Christ. Amen.

(by Rev. Sally J. DeMasters)