

“On the Journey to Family”

1. Growing up going to church in Mexico, I knew I had more than one mom and dad.
 - a. Let me explain
 - b. I grew up in Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church in downtown Monterrey Mexico,
 - i. and while I did have some relatives who attended church with us, the connection I had with the majority of the people was merely as members of the church.
 - ii. And yet, we called each other “brother” and “sister”
 - iii. More than that: mom and dad could not keep their eye on me the whole time we were in church, and it was clear that any misbehavior would not only be addressed by another adult in the church, stand-in moms and dads, but it would then be promptly reported to my mom.
 - iv. I’m not going to say I got a spanking twice, but you get the picture.
 - c. Maybe you grew up in a small church, or in a small community where this was also the case.
 - i. You had many other people looking in on you, seeing what you were up to.
 - ii. Correcting you even.
 - iii. It was a kind of extended family, which comes with its pluses and minuses
 - d. My mom took it a step farther.
 - i. She wanted me to see an extended chosen family even outside of the church context
 - ii. I remember clearly that when I went to first grade, mom sat me down and told me: that teacher is your second mom.
 - iii. Meaning: listen to her as you listen to me.
 1. The notion of getting in trouble both at school and then at home remained a threat.
 2. But the main point wasn’t the getting in trouble part.
 3. The idea was that there were people around me, as a child, who would care for me and about me, giving me guidance and support
 4. And I can’t help but think about that mindset even today as an adult,
 - a. when I see people around me as peers, yes, but like I would see my many cousins,
 - b. and then I also see some who are my elders with whom I have a family-like relationship, if not as parents certainly as older siblings, or wise aunts and uncles giving support and guidance
2. For a passage focused on family, our Gospel is a bit jarring when taken as a standalone story
 - a. It sure sounds like Jesus was distancing himself from his mom and siblings, but I think there was more going on there
 - b. I don’t think Jesus was dishonoring his mother.
 - i. It seems from other passages in scripture that he remained in close contact with his family

- ii. But here he was acknowledging that his family had been expanding for some time.
 - iii. He was a grown adult, a leader in the community, a teacher with followers.
 - iv. Life expectancy in the ancient Roman world was not a whole lot beyond 40 years <https://earlychurchhistory.org/daily-life/longevity-in-the-ancient-world/>
 - 1. His mother Mary was pushing well past that age.
 - 2. She may have been widowed.
 - 3. She had other children to look after her.
 - 4. But still it would have been disruptive in the culture of the time for Jesus, as the first born, not to be primarily looking after his mom.
 - c. But when his family comes to see him and asks about him, Jesus looks around and points to the disciples and followers around him and identifies them as part of his family
 - i. That is to say, he was expanding his community in a new direction
 - ii. Was Mary coming to tell Jesus to change what he was doing? Was she coming to take care of him (to mother him) when she saw him stretching himself thin?
 - iii. We can't know for sure. But I think we can assume that Jesus would have expected his mom to mother him and his new extended family also to care for him as they lived a transient life, from place to place, teaching and healing, and while he was at it, upsetting the religious establishment.
3. This Lent we are invited to acknowledge we are on a journey to family, a family of faith who walks alongside us and who nurtures us
 - a. This isn't to say that we don't need or value our "first" family
 - b. Rather it is an awareness that the people who sit in the pews around us are our family of faith
 - c. Together with our family of origin, biological, adopted, or chosen, we have also this family of faith
 - i. They're here to support us and guide us
 - ii. To learn with us and learn from us
 - iii. And together we can discern what God is up to in our lives and community
 4. It may be too simplistic to say: Who is my family? But with the help of the 1 John passage we can nuance that idea a little bit
 - a. The passage uses a wonderful verb: Abide (to stay -in a given place, ... continue, dwell, endure, be present ...). <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3306/kjv/tr/0-1/>
 - b. It says that God abides, dwells, is present with us. And we likewise abide in God
 - c. And because God is love, then this love is present in us and with us,
 - d. This sense of presence, this sense of being in the presence and embodiment of love, means that our relationships with other people need to be consistently loving
 - e. You can't love God and hate another person, says the passage. "The commandment we have from God is this: those who love God must love their sisters and brothers also."
 5. In God, there is plenty of love to go around. Likewise, in our connections with each other in pursuit of feeling and sharing that love, we discover that we're surrounded by family, that we're lifted up by family, if we're only willing to see it and name it as such. On this long journey of faith called Lent, it helps to know we're walking this path side by side with family.