

Body of Christ – Family of God

Not everyone comes from a good family. Even the concept of family has broken down over the years. Families come in all shapes and sizes so, when you talk about the family of God in a warm and inviting sense, not everyone understands what you mean - especially those who come from broken homes. But family is important, not just to us but to God as well.

God provides us with families through the church. He groups us together through His body and blood and provides us with examples we need to follow to be families who make up the Body of Christ. My husband Mike and I recently moved up to the Kelowna area from Minnesota, USA, so that I could be the new associate Pastor at Grace Lutheran Church. We both left our families behind when we moved. I come from a very close-knit family that lives fairly spread out. Mike comes from a family that lives very close to one another but is not as tight. Overall, family is a safe word for both of us: it brings memories of warm and loving times. It helps us to recall those that we love and it gives us a sense of safety and belonging. One of the things that drew us to Grace Lutheran was the immediate sense of family instilled in us by those we met through the interview process. The people of Grace were warm, inviting, loving and welcoming - all characteristics of a family Mike and I were looking for, to fill in the hole left by our move away from our own families.

However, the same characteristics that drew us to Grace may put others off. Those of us who came from strong families might not understand that, but for those who came from broken homes and broken families, the openness and welcoming is alien, foreign, and it can even be scary. Think about coming from a home where people were only nice in order to get something from you. Or that the happy family times, fueled by alcohol, only preceded the dark times, filled with abuse and violence. One would not so easily walk into a church surrounded by "welcoming" people because the trust level has not been built and one's background actually may caution one to be wary of those who are kind, or inviting, or friendly.

This reality saddens me both as a person and as a Pastor. How do we reshape the reality of family for those who do not know or understand? I think it really begins with the small things; the personal stories about what people have done for us in the past. It comes from telling the truth about who we are as people. It comes from acknowledging that even in strong families, people do not always get along or agree, but we must learn to disagree in ways that are productive and eventually end in reconciliation.

In the five months that I have been at Grace Lutheran Church, I have learned more about what it means to be a family strongly rooted in Christ than I believe I did for the first 27 years of my

life - and remember, I said I grew up in a great family. I come from a long line of pastors and teachers. We had our issues as family members but the blood tie was always a strong enough pull to bring us back to reconciliation. The family created within the body of Christ is different. The blood flowing in our veins does not tie us together; instead we are brought together by the blood of one savior, the blood of Jesus Christ that offers us reconciliation to God and connects us all together in salvation. This is a stronger, more binding tie than even the ones in your biological families, good or bad. This is the family God gives us, to strengthen us in times of hardship, to teach us and guide us, to support us in faith. It is the family that God invigorates through the Holy Spirit. God builds us up to be a family of faith. It is this family that fills in when our biological families can't or won't be there. The Body of Christ is a family that can change the reality of what family has been for you in the past.

I have learned well over the last few days what it means to have a family of faith surrounding me. On the 9th of January I slipped and broke my ankle in two places. As I lay in hospital waiting for surgery, I started to feel a great longing for the family that I had left behind in the states. I wanted my Mom and Dad and my brothers to be there. I was afraid of the approaching surgery, in pain, sitting in a hospital in a country I had only lived in for 5 months, and I started to wonder how I had gotten here in the first place. However, I wasn't in the hospital very long before the Senior Pastor, Ed Skutshek, came by to visit and see how I was. Then next morning, a parishioner stopped by to check in; the day I left to come home, another person stopped by to see me. Now today, as I sit at home with my leg up, writing this article, I have just enjoyed a meal brought to me by a wonderful lady in our congregation. The kindnesses of these people, the e-mails, calls, meals and visits are all things that my family would have done for me, had I been living close to them. I no longer wonder why God brought my husband and I so far away from family.

God has moved us into a different kind of family. He has brought me out of the family in which I grew up to teach me what it means to be a part of a larger family connected through the Savior and given to one another. As Jesus hung on the cross, He looked down on His own mother and knew that she needed family to care for her. The Gospel of John, Chapter 19:26-27 says, "When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing beside her, He said to His mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then He said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home."

It is here that we see Jesus, even as He is dying on the cross, provide family for His own mother. Through this act of creating family, we see that it is important to God that we have strong families to support and nurture us. The good news is that we are given to one another to be family through the death and resurrection of Christ. We are bound together in His love and

brought into His family. So it doesn't matter if you have a great family who live thousands of miles away or a broken family, or seem to have no family at all. God has provided you with family through Himself. I have found a growing, nurturing and caring family to be a part of in Grace Lutheran Church. Christ is calling to you today, calling you to be a part of His family, to be a part of the body of Christ and to dwell with people who care for you. May you know God's blessing of family in your life.

In His Grip,
Pastor Karen Seifert