



June 10, 2018 - A New Kind of Family **Given by Rev. Mattei**

I left the R.C. Church because as a minister I wanted a family and married Stephanie. Then Giacomo, Simone, Desiree arrived, then cats. I wondered: will I ever sleep again? And yet, it is still fun and rewarding to see them grow and mature. Some of you have lost children: I can't even imagine the grief and how much you miss them and would like to have them back! There is something to be said about family and blood-relations. And yet as we move physically and/or emotionally into new environments we find ways to create new families and new ties that bind with neighbors and friends.

Jesus' family comes to "restrain him" and to pick him up because he sounds "out of his mind." In an honor/shame culture, a child's behavior—even when grown—is of great consequence. The social standing of Jesus' family is jeopardized by his behavior. Rumor has it that he has been behaving strangely since he went to see John and took a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole family is shamed.

Jesus comes across as hostile and shockingly harsh when he negates his family ties: "A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And 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." (Mk 3:32-35) Jesus expands the concept of family: if according to tradition it is enough for one to be born into a Hebrew family to be considered part of the People of God and therefore saved (Lk 3:8; Mk 10:28-30; Rom 9:6-8), Jesus now comes proclaiming a new family defined as those who seek to do God's will—whatever their family or kinship background. As prof. Matt Skinner of Luther Seminary describes, "In that culture, in which responsibility, identity, stability, and opportunity were so bound up with kinship structures, Jesus' pronouncement of a new family might elicit gasps. But it also can bring great joy to some, especially those followers who find themselves estranged from their own families of origin."

Franciscan sister and author, Ilia Delio, refers to the same theme when she explains that "[w]hen love transforms our actions in a way that Christ is "represented"— then we become mothers, sisters and brothers of Christ. This birthing of Christ in the life of the believer . . . is a way of conceiving, birthing, and bringing Christ to the world in such a way that the Incarnation is renewed. It is making the gospel alive." (*Franciscan Prayer*, 150-151.)

What Jesus attempts to do, i.e. bring about the reign of God, subverts the social order. He is setting himself up for a head (heart?) collision with the authorities and those who count, even his own family. By promoting the liberating values of the Kingdom, he denounces oppressive power structures that dehumanize people and lock them into social categories of power and control. Trying to subvert the system can only be considered crazy, especially if one considers the dramatic consequences of such choices (rebuke, isolation and possibly death.) One must be crazy to embark on such a collision course.

But what makes Jesus crazy? He is crazy for saying things such as the one about the commandment to love one's neighbors being similar to the one to love God, or for saying to love and even pray for our enemies. He is utterly insane for suggesting that the meek, the humble, the generous, the peacemakers, the merciful and the pure of heart, actually even those who mourn and are persecuted belong to the reign of God (see Mt 5). Jesus went out of his way to suggest that those who follow him are better off seeking to do what pleases the Father in heaven (Mt 6:5-7; 21:31; Jn 14:31) rather than man (Mt 10:28; Jn 5:44 and 12:43).

But Jesus' instructions are not limited to holy and ethical living. He undermines the very social structure that holds his world together: in God's holy Kingdom no people is over people; no man over woman; no adult over child; no rich over poor; no Jews over foreigners; but all are equal in the eyes of God. Jesus goes as far as asserting that those who hold any form of power lord it over others but it shouldn't be so among the disciples for "the last will be first and the first last." In fact, those who want to be first need to become like children (Mt 18:2-4). This is certainly not a welcome thought to those who want to be first and strive to come out on top. Jesus is indeed crazy about wanting to connect us to the true Spirit of God. For that purpose he isn't afraid to face sacrifice, and death for us is not a loss to him. The foolishness of the cross is mind-blowing (1 Cor 1:18-25) and cannot be understood by the unspiritual, i.e. those not connected to the Spirit of Jesus (1 Cor 2:14). Acting according to the words of Jesus renders Christianity a foolishness hard to comprehend (1 Cor 3:18-19).

We are called to become fools for Jesus, a global movement of disciples who follow Jesus in making the world know about the life changing and boundaries shattering love of Jesus. Lives are being transformed as caring lay and ordained persons live the good news of Jesus in our companion churches in Haiti, Suriname, Guyana and Cuba. LGBTQ people find strength and companions in worshiping communities who go out of their way to welcome and embrace them. Outdoor ministries expand their reach to young and old alike and people are encouraged on their journey to know the God of creation and the need for environmental justice. Faithful disciples express their faith as they engage in advocacy on behalf of immigrants, refugees, children, the homeless and those domestically abused. Christian life is a foolish life in the footsteps of the fool who embraced the cross on our behalf. The wisdom of Jesus' foolishness gives us life and shapes us into his family. Let no one be left outside.