

**Sermon**  
**7 June 2015**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

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**Text: Mark 3:20-35**

**Communion**

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Family. What does the word family mean to you?

According to the Telegraph, in 2011, a typical family looks like this: They wake up at 6.57am, get home from work at 5.15pm, and go to bed at 10.39pm.

They watch a collective nine hours of telly a day, have just two hours of "quality time" together a week, and eat spaghetti bolognese on Mondays.

They spend £76 per week on groceries, £12 per week on alcohol, and have £3,280 in savings. Their favourite entertainment is watching television, with the best-loved show being the BBC's Dr Who.

This is according to researchers who interviewed 2,000 families.

When I googled the word "family", the first thing that came up was lots of photo's consisting of a mum, dad, a boy and a girl of about primary school age.

Now that might be the ideal picture of a family, consisting of 4 beautiful people with smiles so big that the photo resembles a toothpaste ad! But we all know that, in reality, families actually very seldom look like that.

Although a family photo can look amazing, by just looking at a photo nobody can see what was really going on when that photo was taken – all the turmoil and emotions hidden behind a smile for a few seconds. And the picture of our families is not *a/ways* a beautiful one; it can even sometimes look pretty messy.

Sometimes there are members of our family we wish we didn't have to be associated with, people who embarrass and disappoint us, and although we know it should probably not be like that, we try to avoid them as much as we can.

Then there are the photos that break our hearts to look at, because somebody is missing. Somebody's who's leaving or passing away has left such a big gap that it disturbed the entire balance of family life.

But apart from the beautiful photos we want to frame, the upsetting photos we want to throw away, and the sad photos we can't help but look at often, there are also the very important funny photos:

A wee boy asked his mum: "Mummy, why are some of your hairs turning grey?"

The mother tried to use this occasion to teach her son an important lesson: "It is because of you, dear. Every time you are naughty one of my hairs turn grey!"

To which the wee boy very innocently replied: “Now I know why all Granny’s hair are grey!”

But no matter what picture you call to mind when you hear the word “family”, it definitely means something different to you than what it would have meant to Jesus and the people of his time.

In the first century world the family you were born into did not only determine your status in the community, but it was also your primary economic, religious, educational and social network, and of course, your connection to the land.

So what does all this mean?

Where today we live in a house, work somewhere else, socialize in lots of different places, buy the things we need in shops, come to church to worship God, go to the hospital when we are unwell, go to school or university or college to get educated, go to different fields or arenas to play sport and go to exotic destinations for our holidays, and where we move out of our family home when we grow up and in time start our own wee family unit, *all* of this happened in one place in New Testament times, in the extended family home!

Extended families lived together and took care of each other and *everything* they needed was just there. A family could be as big as this village – and the bigger, the better. Every single member of a family had the same goal, and that was to make sure that the family had a good name and an honorable status in society.

And beware if you did *anything* to bring shame upon your family name... Their attitude towards troublemakers was to get rid of the proverbial 'bad apple' straight away!

All this sets the scene for our reading – because Jesus was among a crowd of people, comprising of people who hung on his lips, and others who didn't like what he said or did just one bit. These people who didn't like Jesus tried their best to label him as someone bad – demon-possessed even – because they knew that if they could get a negative label to stick, nobody would listen to him.

Although on a much smaller scale, deviance labelling can still cause people lots of damage to their careers today – once you're known as a "cheat" or a "fraud" or a "drunk", it's very hard to shake that label – especially if you are a well-known politician or sports personality... In Biblical times the labels just looked different – "barren", "unclean", "sinner", "sorcerer" – and did far more social damage than it does today.

So because Jesus' enemies were trying to give him a bad name, his family was worried about him, but not because of what was happening to him personally, but because he was doing things and saying things that could potentially drag their family name through the mud, and they wanted to prevent that at all costs.

So the powers-that-be tried to get rid of Jesus, because he made the people think out of the box for the first time ever, and they didn't want that; and his family tried to shut him up because they just wanted a normal, quiet family. But neither of these worked for Jesus.

He gave his opponents a witty answer that not only put them in their places, but probably labelled *them* negatively, and as far as his family goes – he redefined what the word family means altogether.

Where previously you became a member of a family by being born into it, now, Jesus said, you could become a member of the family of God if you believed in him.

A radical move, but something that changed even our lives forever.

So what does all this mean?

Jesus couldn't be bothered with the rules and regulations of society, all the do's and don'ts and right's and wrong's. He tried to show the people of his time that the things they built their lives upon, were actually quite trivial.

The only thing that really matters is your relationship with God. So if being a member of a family was going to make it hard for him to do what God wanted him to do, he'd just not be a member of that family anymore. So he formed a new family, in which members could really *live* – in more than one way.

And that's why, to this day, we call each other brothers and sisters here in church, because we are members of God's family.

And I hope that after this long explanation you'll now understand what a big deal it was, and still is, to belong to a family!

Like you were born into your actual family, you later became a member of the family of God by means of baptism. And to remind you what it meant to be a member of this family, you took part in Holy Communion.

Communion was a meal shared by everybody – indicating that in *this* family there is no discrimination. Everybody is of equal importance, and even if you made mistakes you were still welcome. No bad apples in the eyes of God. And we should remember *that* when we, as brothers and sisters in Christ, continue with that tradition today.

It's quite interesting that Jesus chose only to redefine the term family, and not use a different term altogether. Apart from the fact that they were not all blood-related, this new family functioned like an actual family. They were a surrogate family, a kin group that formed the social network they needed in order to survive.

I understand very well about surrogate families, because my actual extended family lives too far away to fulfill the supportive role a family is supposed to play. But that's okay, because I have you:  
My brothers and sisters and aunties and uncles and grannies and granddads and nieces and nephews in Christ.

We are one huge family. God gave us to each other, and we need each other. As is the case with our actual families, we might not always be the perfect picture of harmony and happiness, but that doesn't matter, because we are a family. And in a family, love is stronger than anything else.

I can't even remember how many times I have been told that my youngest is his dad's double. They look the same, and they even laugh the same! If you see Nehan, you see André. And that's what it should be like with us in the family of God too.

We are members of this family, because we believe in God. And just like people, by looking at Nehan, say: there goes a wee Groenewald! So anybody who has to do with us should be able to notice straight away that we are Christians; we need to resemble God, our Father, in the same way Nehan resembles André.

So let's love each other, reach out to each other, care for one another, forgive each other, and be at each other's back, so the world out there can see a picture of *one big happy family*. Because that might just well be what they need to come in through these doors.

Amen