



Trail Guide – July 20, 2020:

Ordinary Time

What makes for a family? Or, perhaps a better question, who makes a family? Who do you consider family? In our increasingly pluralistic culture, family has come to mean many things. For those who are widely separated from their biological family, close friends may come to be considered family. We all yearn for close relationships of deep mutuality, love, support, and affinity. Every so often, we even come to find this experience of family in our local church. An older member steps into the place of a beloved grandparent or parent who is far away, or even deceased. And, while we refer to one another as “sisters and brothers in Christ” some actually become like a brother or a sister to us.

No one’s biological family is perfect, flawless. Neither is our church family. Furthermore, just because all, or most, or even some, of our biological family follow Christ does not mean our family never struggles. No wonder much of what we read in the New Testament letters of Paul, Peter, James, and John has to do with relationships. As we re-read these verses from Ephesians 5 and 6, think about what life was like in the first Century Hellenistic Culture. There were certain norms and expectations, often referred to in subsequent centuries as “household codes”. Yet in reality, there is no record of universally accepted household codes of behavior. The primary directives in a still patriarchal society focused on the father/head of the household. What marks the Christian code that Paul reminds the Ephesians of is that he addressed each of the members of the household as individual moral agents – not just the patriarch. What a witness to the culture.

Mon, 7/20 – [Ephesians 5:21](#) – In light of what is said above, why do you think Paul opens this section on roles and relationships in the family with this general admonition, addressed to all? For those who are filled with the Spirit of God, subject to Christ, what does it mean to submit, or be subject to, one another? In this context, how is this an expression of reverence for Christ? What might this look like today?

Tues, 7/21 – [Ephesians 5:22](#) – Raise your hand if you prefer to remove this verse from scripture? Unfortunately, and despite what many would like to do, we cannot simply pick and choose, or even “rewrite” the Bible. No, we must, like Jacob/Israel, wrestle with God (and ourselves) to understand and apply the principle expressed here.

Wed, 7/22 – [Ephesians 5:23-24](#) – These two verses raise all sorts of issues and even red flags for 21st Century readers. However, focus on the comparison, “as the church submits to Christ”. How is this done? What did this look like then? What might it look like today? How well do we, in the church “submit” to Christ?

Thur, 7/23 – [Ephesians 5:25-27](#) – Paul has addressed wives as autonomous moral agents. Now he turns the spotlight on husbands. “Love”, here, is a command; not a feeling. It is a call to action that also shapes one’s attitude. Paul use of agape expresses the highest form of love – love that seeks first and foremost what is best for the one loved. Christ is both the model and the measure of this love. This admonition was completely counter-cultural in a patriarchal society. How do you love in your family?

Fri, 7/24 – [Ephesians 5:28-29](#) – Further substantiation for the admonition to love, along with an intensification of the metaphorical example. How does Christ care for the church? What might this mean for how we care for one another?

Sat, 7/25 – [Ephesians 5:30-33](#) – Bottom line for this part of Paul’s discussion of family roles and responsibilities: unity. Oneness. A unity and oneness (4:3) that is nurtured and maintained through mutual respect and sacrificial love, both within the home by all members, and in the church. As you have come to see others in the church as your family, where have you seen, where do you see, where do you make real mutual respect and sacrificial love?

(Next Sunday, the 26th, we’ll further examine these verses as we explore how they contribute to the theme of Paul’s message: the reconciliation of all things to God through Christ, who is our peace.)

Feel free to share reflections, reactions, questions, inspirations – jim@leesburgumc.org. Looking forward to next Sunday!