



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sermon by Pastor Jami Anderson, December 24, 2011

The final scene of the crime show on TV showed a sad female victim saying wistfully, “All I wanted was to have a family.” The hardened investigator looks at her and walks away saying, “Family is what we all want.”

This seems to be a season and a night when we focus on family. The holiday songs tell us that “I’ll be home for Christmas” and “It’ll be a Blue Christmas With Out You.” And many of us are here with our own family members and over the next few days we will take part in different family gatherings of varying types and sizes. Family gets a lot of attention at this time of year. And we are gathered here this evening to share in remembering the birth of a special baby into a special family. It is touching to think of Mother Mary cradling her first newborn son in her arms while Joseph stands nearby. That is the ideal scene for Christmas Eve and of family.

I bet many of us want to live in the ideal family – but you know, really, it’s impossible. We can try, and believe me I have, but others just won’t let us control their thoughts and actions and behaviors. And if we let it, that desire and effort to create the ideal family can be frustrating, even heartbreaking. And we are gathered here this evening to share in remembering the birth of a special baby into a special family. So, it may be fun once in awhile to imagine the ideal, but it is richer and fuller and healthier to embrace the present, the real, the true life that Christ came to share with us. Our ideal images and hopes for family are often quite limiting to the possibility of living life in a larger world.

Recently I stumbled onto reading “The Education of Little Tree” by Forrest Carter. This autobiographical book tells the story of a few years in Carter’s childhood. Orphaned at about age 5, Carter was taken by grandparents to live back in the Ozark Mountains in an unconventional lifestyle. And in those years he learns so much about the world and family. I quote from the book.

“Granma’s name was Bonnie Bee. I knew that when I heard him late at night say, “I kin ye, Bonnie Bee, he was saying, “I love ye” for the feeling was in the words. And when they would be talking and Granma would say, “Do ye kin me, Wales?” and he would answer, “I kin ye,” it meant, “I understand ye.” To them, love and understanding was the same thing. Granma said you couldn’t love something you didn’t understand; nor could you love people, nor God, if you didn’t understand the people and God. Grandpa and Granma had an understanding, and so they had a love. Granma said the understanding run deeper as the years went by, and she reckined it would get beyond anything mortal folks could think upon or explain. And so they called it “kin.”

Grandpa said back before his time “Kinfolks” meant any folks that you understood and had an understanding with, so it meant, “loved folks”. But people got selfish, and brought it down to mean just blood relatives; but that actually it was never meant to mean that.”

Grandpa goes on to tell a story about an old Cherokee named ‘Coon Jack who was awfully hard to get along with. But one day his pa told him the story of Coon Jack’s trouble. *Grandpa said, he come might near crying fer Coon Jack. He said after that, it didn’t matter what Coon Jack said or did...he loved him because he understood him. Grandpa said that such was “kin” and most of people’s mortal trouble come about by not practicing it; from that and politicians.”*

Kin. We use the phrase kindred spirits to reflect those with whom we share a similar nature or character. Kindred means we can “read” each other – understand each other. To think of our kin as beyond that of blood relatives opens our world to loving and finding family beyond a conventional definition of that word.

And for us gathered here, I find that both hopeful and challenging. Generally, I’d say we might be willing to consider kin or kindred spirits those people who are in our church, or our snowmobile club, or our town, perhaps even our state. We like to have a comfort zone of those people we are willing to identify with or willing try and understand. And that makes sense, because really, how can we be expected to try and understand just EVERYONE! Everyone - impossible.

Impossible. And here is where Jesus enters in. Here is the miracle of this evening. Here is where Jesus wipes out the idealized boundaries of bloodlines defining families and the boundaries of community or state or nation defining our kin. The birth of Jesus washes away, destroys any and all boundaries that we may wish to create, the boundaries that give us a sense of false safety and identity.

For tonight Jesus is born. That baby in the manger that looks out at all of us and says, “I kin ye.” “I kin ye – each and every one of you. I kin ye – all of you, all of you everywhere. I kin ye.”

And all that remains, all that remains for each of us....is to decide if we say, “I kin ye” back. I kin ye, Jesus. I kin ye with an understanding that will run deeper as the years go by, until it gets beyond anything mortal folks can think upon or explain.

We are kin.

Thanks be to God.