

Chosen Family

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[0 : 00] Thank you for joining us whenever it is you're finding us. And I do just want to thank Pastor Anthony, Pastor Chinetta, and all the members of our leadership and our Gathering Again team that have been so faithfully sort of making decisions for us as a church over the last two years.

They have been carrying sort of this big weight of deciding whether we're in person when we're online, and just am so grateful for them. And before we dive in, let's go ahead and pray so I can get some of these jitters out.

God, thank you so much for this day. Thank you for the opportunity that we have to come together as a community online. We are grateful that we are still able to say our hellos and give our smiles in the chat and hear a word for you.

God, I pray that you would be with me as I am sharing this word that you've put on my heart and that you would allow your word to come through me, that you would get me out of the way, and that your word would be present.

In your name, amen. Amen. So we are going to start today with a little bit of a middle school grammar lesson. If we were all in person, I would have you raise your hands.

[1 : 20] But who remembers what an idiom is? Essentially, thank you, Pastor Anthony, for the enthusiastic hand raise. An idiom is essentially a colloquial phrase that we use to express an idea that you wouldn't actually get the idea from the phrase.

So it's raining cats and dogs means it's pouring. How does it mean that? Unsure, but we all know that it means that. If somebody spilled the beans, it means that they told a secret that they weren't supposed to tell.

And the list kind of goes on and on. But over time, some of the sort of original meanings of idioms have been taken out of context and sort of changed the meanings.

So the first one would be great minds think alike, which is the idea that if a bunch of people share an idea, it's probably a pretty good idea. But the full idiom is actually great minds think alike, but fools rarely differ, which is the complete opposite.

It's saying that just because a lot of people have an idea does not necessarily mean it's a good idea, that there might be some additional sort of thought and consideration put in.

[2 : 30] Another one is jack of all trades, master of none. That's sort of used to disparage people who don't have sort of one particular thing they're really good at.

But the full phrase is jack of all trades, master of none, but often better than a master of one, which is saying it's better to be able to do a bunch of things pretty well than only have one thing that you can do perfectly.

And our third and final for today is the idiom that blood is thicker than water, which is saying that the people who you're related to, the people you share blood with, are more important than sort of acquaintances and other people in your life.

But the original text of that idiom was blood of the covenant is thicker than water of the womb. So again, the exact opposite, saying that those who you have chosen to be in relationship with through, at this time, a blood oath, but we're not advertising those, are more important than whoever gave birth to you.

Saying that sort of the people you choose to surround yourself with matter, sort of just as much, if not more, than your family of origin. So with that in mind, let's go ahead and dive into our scripture for today.

[3 : 47] We are looking at Mark chapter 3, verse 31 through 35. And it says, Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived.

Standing outside, they sent someone to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you. Who are my mother and my brothers? He asked.

Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother. So Jesus is essentially sort of backing up that idea that it matters who you spend your time with.

It matters who you have the same goals, the same values as, as much, if not more, than those who you're biologically related to. We're going to do a little aside for anyone who was raised Catholic or Eastern Orthodox or some branches of Lutheran and Anglican and Reformed Christianity.

Some of you may be wondering, sort of, why are we talking about Jesus having brothers? There is an idea particularly strong in these religions, including Catholicism, in which I was raised, that Mary stayed a virgin forever.

[5 : 04] That she never had sex her whole life. And that is not really backed up by the canonical books of the Bible, the books that we have chosen as our sacred scripture. There are some other books that you can make that extrapolation from, and the idea sort of took off in the second century.

But as a sort of cynical woman in 2022, I think that it's probably just a way for the church to make women having sex a dirty thing. And we can't have Catholics called the Blessed Virgin Mary as someone who's been made dirty.

People who believe this say that the brothers in this text are Joseph's sons from another marriage, another thing that is never mentioned in the Bible. So for today, we are going to work off the assumption that these are Jesus' blood relatives, his biological brothers.

Aside over, you're welcome Catholics. Go discuss that at your next holiday. So as we heard two weeks ago, Pastor Tanetta touched on sort of Jesus' family's reaction to Jesus healing on the Sabbath and the sort of notoriety that he was beginning to pick up.

It says, oop, we gotta find it. It says in Mark chapter 3, verse 21, Jesus has a whole crowd around him, and it says, when his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said he is out of his mind.

[6 : 35] See, these were people who had grown up with Jesus, who had raised him. They had taught him how to read. They taught him how to do whatever the equivalent of riding a bike was.

And they had certain expectations. When you raise someone, when you grow up with someone, you have an idea of how you think their life is going to turn out. And, you know, Jesus couldn't stay by that idea.

You know, I wonder how many times, even though Mary knew that Jesus was God, how many times she forgot that he was Emmanuel, God with us, and just thought of him as her little Joshua running around and making a mess in her house.

But Jesus can't stay confined and defined by what his family expects of him. If he moves back to Nazareth and has a wife and some kids like they probably want, then he won't be able to live into that full identity of being truly God.

And in probably some smaller ways, we've all had similar experiences. It's sort of the classic Disney Channel movie that the teenage boy gives up sports because he has to follow his dreams, not your dreams, Dad.

[7 : 52] But we've all had a version of that, I bet. You know, we've had to tell our parents that we're finding a new church that's different from the one they raised us in.

That we're not going to pursue that major regardless of the job stability. That our marriage is going to look a little different than they thought because rather than a bride and a groom, there will be two brides or two grooms.

That the name they gave us as a kid doesn't fit us. And that we have different pronouns that we'd like them to use. No one is surprised. And I'm making this about the LGBTQ community.

Hello, it's me. Get used to it. See, the thing that the LGBTQ community has had to go through is not living up to our family's expectations. And in that, we do what Jesus does in this passage.

We find and choose our own families. LGBTQ people have been choosing their own families for decades, if not centuries, because their families couldn't stay with them for whatever reason.

[8 : 57] Their families decided that they were not going to continue caring and loving for them. If you've watched the show Pose, you've seen Queer Chosen Family in action.

If you haven't, seasons one and two are on Netflix. Please text me when it's done. If you've seen season three, do not text me. I do not have HBO, and I have not seen it yet, and I'll be very mad if you spoil anything for me.

But that show is based on truth. It's based on these families that sprung up in New York, and I'm sure other cities in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, where queer people rallied around each other and provided for each other, giving each other a home and a meal.

In 1970, a 25-year-old Marsha P. Johnson and a 19-year-old Sylvia Rivera started Star, the street transvestite action revolutionaries. For three years, they provided food and housing for unhoused queer kids in New York City.

They pooled their resources so that kids had a place to sleep, even when their parents decided that they couldn't sleep in their own homes anymore. And it's not all chosen families are for queer people.

[10:15] You know, there's a reason that we love shows like Friends, as problematic as it may now appear, like Golden Girls, where, you know, people have found each other, and even though they're just friends, they have made families for themselves.

If you have somebody who brought you soup last time you were sick, if you have somebody who reads your resume before you submit it for that next big job application, you can claim them as your chosen family.

And give them just as much love as your biological family or your family of origin. There are a couple other examples of chosen family in the Bible, the most famous probably being Ruth and Naomi.

So Naomi is a Jewish woman who is living in Moab, and she has a husband and two sons. Those two sons marry foreign women. And then Naomi's husband and two sons pass away.

And Naomi makes the choice that she is going to tell her daughters-in-law to go home, back to their parents, and, you know, hopefully maybe remarry, or at least rely on other family for support.

[11:25] And that she, Naomi, is going to return to Judah to be cared for by sort of her community. And one of the daughters-in-law, Orpah, decides to go back and makes what we might think of as the logical decision to sort of go back to her family and her siblings and sort of try to get another shot at this whole thing.

But Ruth decides to stay with Naomi. And it's remarkable, so remarkable, that the first time she meets Boaz, who will become her husband, spoiler, it's a quick book, read it if you haven't, the first time she meets Boaz in Ruth chapter 2, verse 11, he says, I've been told all about what you've done for your mother-in-law since the death of her husband, how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before.

So Boaz has never met her before, and yet he's already heard of this sort of amazing thing that she's done for Naomi. And I think we get sort of a hint in that statement that he makes.

Her mother and father have each other. You know, they may have other sons, they may have daughters who have married well, and they have opportunities to be provided for.

And Ruth has a relationship with Naomi. You know, based on how old people typically got married during this time, we can estimate that, you know, Ruth probably got married in her late teens, and it says in the text that she's been living with Naomi and her family for 10 years, almost half her life.

[13:00] And Naomi, you know, wanting to spare Ruth the struggle and the real future of begging for what they need and gleaning and essentially sort of taking the refuse of others for their food, Naomi says, just go home.

Just try again. You'll find a new husband. You've got family. You'll be okay. And Ruth, in response, offers one of the most beautiful oaths in all of Scripture.

Ruth says in chapter 1, verse 16, don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay.

Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.

And Naomi relents. She accepts that for whatever reason, her daughter-in-law has chosen to stick with her, and the two women help each other. You know, they support each other.

[14:08] Ruth goes and does the sort of manual labor, and Naomi does the sort of behind-the-scenes idea generation that eventually leads to Ruth and Boaz marrying.

Ruth is in Jesus' genealogy, and one of the only two women who has a whole book in the Protestant Bible about her. So her choice to stick with her chosen family is clearly one that those who were sort of gathering the Scripture saw as very important.

Another example of chosen family we can find in the book of Acts, in talking about the early church. After Peter's sermon on Pentecost, in Acts chapter 2, starting at verse 41, it says, Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about 3,000 were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship and to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. [15:21] They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The early church came together after this amazing word from Peter, after the blessing of the Holy Spirit, and formed a family. They provided for each other and sort of, you know, became knit together.

And that's sort of our second point for today, is that the church, and specifically sort of your local church, should be a family. I would bet that a lot of us were not raised in churches like The Table. And unless you are under 10 years old, you were not raised at The Table specifically. So we have all made a choice to be here. You know, to paraphrase Casablanca, out of all the churches in all the towns in all the world, we walked into this one.

And we've made a decision to stay. If you've been here for more than a couple weeks, I hope that you think of The Table as your home and as a family.

[16:30] And, like with family, we know that there will be sort of bumps and bruises along the way. Maybe you wish that we had more organ-style music instead of guitars.

Maybe you wish that we had really pushed through and tried to be in person in January. Maybe you think that I should have stopped talking five minutes ago and you're ready for me to be done. But you're still here, I hope.

So we're here as a family. You know, we are here to make each other better, to support each other, and to make our family stronger. I invite you to sort of reflect on the idea of what role you're playing in that.

You know, are you supporting your leaders? Are you calling us out when we do something that is unjust or not inclusive? Are you giving of your time and your resources?

You know, think about what role you take in the family. Are you an oldest sibling who has a checklist and an agenda and is making sure that we all follow it? Are you a middle child who is keeping tempers low and finding a midpoint between different opinions?

[17:38] Are you a youngest child who is just begging everyone to go to therapy, please? Are you a grandparent who has been following Jesus for years and has so much wisdom to pass on?

Are you an aunt or uncle who's married in and is embracing the new traditions and making sure that everyone has a role at the table, figuratively and literally?

I invite you this week to think about how you are living into the idea that this church is your family and knowing that as we move forward and as things continue to evolve and change, there will be bumps and bruises, but that it will all work out if we can all lean into the love together.

How do you hear? Thank you.