

Family Ties: Upward
Ephesians 3:14-20
February 12, 2017
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Palm Harbor United Methodist Church, Palm Harbor, Florida

“Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee; how great thou art, how great thou art! Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee; how great thou art, how great thou art!” (Refrain from hymn “How Great Thou Art”)

Beloved it is good to be back with family!!!! Woo-hoo!!!! How Great God is!!!! Talk about Family Ties and the sermon series we are in---I have directly experienced the family of God, as Rev. Cathy gave the message last week about Family Ties: Together. I knew that in my 7 day hospital stay that you were praying---and together as a church family you were lifting me up. I am honored and blessed to be considered part of this family. Thank you.

I especially want to thank my wife Sarah. Oh my...words can't express. She is the featured Bible Study Leader at the Conference Women's Retreat in Leesburg this weekend. So she is teaching about 300 women at the Life Enrichment Center in Leesburg (she went up on Friday and will be back later today). We have a couple ladies on the Board and several women that are there for the retreat.

I want to thank the great staff family that I have the privilege of serving along side of. The church is the church, ministry needs to continue and they didn't miss a beat. A special shout out to Barbara Odom our Discipleship Coordinator who for 3 weeks has taught my Bible Study on Wednesday night. I hope the class will allow me to return after Barbara's in depth Bible knowledge. Thank you Barbara. Also a special thanks to Rev. Cathy who has preached the last 2 Sundays---preach it sister. Woo-hoo!! I also want to thank Administrative Assistant Karen Martin who was the major contact person and coordinator. All the staff more than stepped up to the plate.

Because of pain and a variety of issues I needed to limit hospital visitors. The prayers, cards, etc. were so wonderfully appreciated. I do want to let you know that one of the first surprise visitors I had was our District Superintendent, Rev. Dr. Candace Lewis. She said I was her first hospital pastoral visit as District Superintendent. She, Sarah and I held hands....and she opened up the heavens as she prayed. Wow! So blessed to be part of this family, this connectional family. I have bowed my knees and given thanks.

So as the sermon series had been planned months ago how appropriate that I am able to share with you Family Ties: Upward. I encourage you to get your Bibles or you electronic devices and follow along as we look at the rich passage written by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 3. We will also have the scripture on the screen. As we look at each verse you may want to make some notes.

Verse 14 and 15: For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, (15) from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,

Now we will get to the reason Paul is bowing his knees in the next verse. God is the creator of all. So in that sense alone we could say that God is Father of each and every one. It is critical that we name Him as our Father.

Let me pause and say for some it is difficult to call God Father. I was blessed with a father who loved me dearly. However, I have heard many stories of Father's who have abandoned, abused or not been there for their children. Therefore some, and understandably so may have a difficulty naming God as their father. Even when we pray "Our Father who art in heaven," for some it is difficult. We must realize that God is a perfect father. Better than the best earthly father anyone could ever have. And he certainly one who will never leave you, abuse you, or mistreat you. He is a good, good father.

The choir sang a song made popular by Chris Tomlin called "Good Good Father." Tomlin said this of the song, "one of those generational songs, its timeless, classic, goes beyond style, goes beyond 'this is my preference for music.'" You see it is the lyrics that are critical. Just as hymns are rich in theology and depth so are many contemporary worship songs. Now the interesting thing I discovered is that Tony Brown and Pat Barrett wrote this song in 2014. Its lyrics are found in the back-story of Tony Browns life. He grew up without a dad. The only person he's ever called Father in His life is God. Wow!!!!

May you who have difficulty and rightfully so...I hope you embrace this song. Good Good Father, perfect in all of His ways to us. Good, Good Father that's who He is. But did you notice the rest of the lyrics..... "and you are loved by Him....it's who you are." Family, you are loved by Him. Who is loved by Him? Xxxxx And don't you forget it!!!!

And so we realize that every family in heaven and on earth is named and that we have this good, good father. We have the realization of Family Ties: Together, but also Family Ties: Upward. We are family because God is our Good Good Father. That means we are related. Oooh, look around...we are related. Now realize that most family trees have a few nuts in them, but we're still related.

Speaking of Family Ties and being a Good Good Father. Visionary Family weekend is coming up at the end of this month. Friday night, for couples 6:30-9 pm. And then Saturday Fathers you can learn about being a good good father. First there is a seminar in the morning 9:30-11:30 challenging both fathers and mothers to grow in their faith and relationship with their adult children. I have heard stories of strained relationships with children that live beyond the home. Here's a seminar to help. And then Saturday afternoon from 12:30-4 for parents impressing the hearts for children for love for god. Childcare and interactive session for children Kindergarten through 12th grade (age appropriate). Let's develop those family ties.

So why did Paul bow his knees. He was praying to the Father that: **Verse 16: that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,**

Oh to be strengthened with power in your inner being. Family---my physical and outer being wasn't in good shape while I was in the hospital. My inner being to be honest was confused, some questions, and had difficulty focusing. My physical being was in pain....and I wasn't to putty to look at....no comments please. In fact I did not shave for about 10-12 days. I was scruffy. I was going to keep the scruff beard and have a vote off in church as to whether to keep it are not. But you know....even if you voted for me to keep it....uh Sarah would have overrode your vote!

The Good Good Father who is creator of all. His riches far exceed anything we can think of. But Paul is bowing on His knees asking for that you....YOU... be strengthened with power. Oh in that hospital to be strengthened with power. When we are weak to be strengthened with power. When we live in ordinary days may we have extraordinary power. You see it is power through His Spirit in your inner being. We are talking about the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1: 8 has Jesus saying that “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses telling people about me everywhere.”

While home recovering I read a book by Rev. Samuel Rodriguez who is the president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference. He also was the Commencement Speaker when Andy graduated from Asbury University. In his 2016 book, “Be Light” he says this that I think relates to being strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit. He says this (page 59) “People of light are people for power! If God’s presence fills your life then you have power:

Power to cast out whatever is not right.
 Power to move whatever stands in your way.
 Power to walk in the midst of storms.
 Power to speak truth with love.
 Power to shake off the dust.
 Power to preach the Word.
 Power to walk in holiness.
 Power to do justice. Power to love mercy.
 Power to say yes.
 Power to say no.
 Power to shine the light.
 Power to change the world!”

Woo-hoo!!!!

And we go on as to why Paul is bowing on his knees: **VERSE 17-19: so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

Paul bows on his knees, focus is Upward---we are family, God is our Good Good Father. Together, Upward. So that we may be strengthened with power of the Holy Spirit and so that...Christ may dwell in your hearts. When you focus Upward it changes your inward and affects your outward. Upward, inward, outward. Say that with me....Upward, inward, outward.

Christ dwelling in our hearts. Rooted and grounded in loved. They will know we are Christians by our love! And so that we may have strength to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth. Huh? What do you mean the breadth and length and height and depth?

What is the breadth of His love? What is the length of His grace? What is the height of His steadfastness to you? What is the depth of His riches? Woo-hoo!!!! Wow....I don't know, I can't comprehend....but that's what I'm talking about. Woo-hoo!!!!

And....and.... so we might know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge and understanding---why---so that....you may be filled with the fullness of God!!!!

Did you hear that....filled with the fullness of God. Filled. Fill 'er up!!!! You think gas is high...think of being filled with the riches of God!!!! Woo-hoo!!!! Sarah gets aggravated with me because I will sometimes drive with my gaslight on. It indicates I need gas. I know about how far that will take me. When Sarah is driving with me....she doesn't like that at all. She says, "That's why the light is on....get off at the next exit." I don't always do that...and well. I've learned...happy wife, happy life. But yes, I will say this although it pains me..."She's right..." Why not filler er up when you know your tank is low. Are you making the spiritual transition here.....huh, huh, huh????

And now this powerful benediction Paul gives: ²⁰**Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,** ²¹**to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.**

Far more abundantly than we ask or think. Now allow me to give a personal illustration. On February 2 Sarah had a "milestone:" birthday. I had asked her back in the fall what she wanted to do. No surprises, no big party....she just wanted all 3 of our children and all 4 grandchildren to be together as Family. Family Ties....are important to us. So in the fall we planned a vacation get away from February 1-5th to celebrate Sarah's birthday. So our children in South Carolina, Jacksonville, and Ft. Myers all took vacation and cleared their calendars to be in Edisto Island, South Carolina. My eldest son Ben made all the arrangements for all the family to be in the same multi room house. As my hospital stay drug on we knew that we would need to cancel. The contract said "No Refunds," and I had already paid the entire price. My son contacted the agency to let them know the situation. Our hope was that they would take the deposit and perhaps hold our money for us to reschedule with them at a later date....but hoping we would not be out of the money. Our son called us so excited that he received an email saying that they were going to refund the entire amount. It was the same day we got a letter from the owners of the home we were going to rent....quoting scripture and giving a prayer of blessing for health.

Whoa...a God thing you think??? Far more abundantly than we could ask or think. Thank you Jesus. Who knew that that agency was part of the Family Tie because of their upward belief in Jesus Christ. So we didn't get to go on our Family trip. Sarah's birthday was Groundhogs day. February 2. I did take her out....rather she took me out...she took back to the Emergency Room for 6 hours to receive an IV. What a special birthday for her as she watched the IV drip in my arm. I think I got a lot of catching up to do with her this year. I am so blessed with Sarah as my soul-mate, life mate. Thank you Jesus.

Paul, says, oh for the power to work within us. What...rather....Who is that power? The Holy Spirit!!!!

“to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations.” All generations. All Ages! All in! It is imperative that this generation be in process of mentoring the next generation. It is necessary that the younger generations feel like this is their family and we hear and listen to their needs and concerns. It is important as a family that has Family Ties: Upward that we focus on Jesus Christ.

To Him be glory in the church. Where is the church????? (We are.) But who are we? Upward, inward and outward. Again let me quote from Samuel Rodriguez's book “Be Light.” (page41-42)

“Who are we? We must respond with clarity, conviction and courage to the following:

We are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14).

We are a city on a hill (Matthew 5:14).

We are people of the Word (1 Kings 8:56).

We are salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16).

We are prophetic and not pathetic.

We are disciples, witnesses and Christ followers (Matthew 28:16-20)

We are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11).

We are children of the Cross (Romans 8:17), fruit of the empty tomb (John 12:24), and a product of the upper room (Acts 2).

We are redeemed of the Lord (Psalm 107:2).

We are the sheep of His pasture (Psalm 100:3).

We are forgiven, free, and favored.

We are called and chosen (1 Peter 2:9).

We are warriors and worshipers (Psalm 144:1)

We are world changers and history makers (Mark 16:15).

We are the church of Jesus Christ, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against us (Mt. 16:18).

Oh the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us. He is our living hope. It's His glory that our hearts long for.

Oh to be filled with the fullness of God to be overcome by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Just to be made more aware of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives.

Oh it's been a rough week for some. May be some rough weeks ahead for some...but may you experience the glory of God's goodness....and even now be overcome by His presence.