

Acts 13:15–16a, 26–33, “Family Promises”
5/8/22, Fourth Sunday of Easter
Pastor Alex Amiot

Acts 13:15–16a, 26–33 (NKJV)

¹⁵ And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”

¹⁶ Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, ...

²⁶ “Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. ²⁷ For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*. ²⁸ And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. ²⁹ Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb. ³⁰ But God raised Him from the dead. ³¹ He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. ³² And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. ³³ God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm:

‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’

I will forever be grateful to our friends, Nick and Miriam, for taking in our family and loving us like we were part of their family. We were living in Minneapolis and couldn’t make it back to Crookston or to Beulah for Thanksgiving. We always found our families on major holidays, so to be staying home and not seeing cousins and grandparents felt weird.

What were we going to do? We could have our own family meal at home, or maybe we could invite some folks over to share a meal with us. But before we could set a plan in place, Nick and Miriam invited us to join their family for Thanksgiving.

My first reaction was something like, “Oh, that’s nice. Sure, we could join them.” But when we arrived I was struck by how it no longer felt just like a visit to someone else’s house, it felt like we had been welcomed into their family space. Thanksgiving had always been intensely family oriented for me, so to be welcomed in by them on that day felt more like a family gesture than a friend gesture. They weren’t just our hosts, they weren’t just our friends, they were our brother and sister.

In today’s text, the Apostle Paul uses family language to describe the people of God. He spoke to those gathered in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia in Acts 13:26 calling them, “Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham.” It may be that some of them had arrived at the synagogue that day with the thought that they were gathering with friends and fellow worshippers, but Paul takes it to the next level—he calls them family.

And this is what you are to me, dear Christians gathered together in our congregation. Men and boys, you are brothers to me. Older men, you are fathers to me. Women and girls, you are sisters to me. Older women, you are mothers to me. This is how the Bible describes our

relationships with one another in the congregation. In 1 Timothy 5:1–2, Paul directs us to love older men in the congregation as we would love “a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

On this Mother’s Day, I am thankful for my mom in Crookston, and for my mom’s mom in Hallock. I am thankful for my wife, the mother of our children, and for her mom in Beulah, and her mom’s mom in Minot. I am thankful for my dad’s mother who is at rest with the Lord and for my great grandmothers who are with her.

I am thankful for the older women in our congregation right here who are to be held in honor by us all as mothers to us in the faith. I am also thankful to the Lord for the dear women from our congregation that have departed to be with Christ—mothers whose work here was finished, and who are now at rest with Jesus.

The congregation is a family. We rejoice with one another over new moms and grandmas. We grieve with one another over a mother’s grief of losing a child, or the grief of losing a mother, or the grief of broken relationships that estrange mother and child. Like the Jews in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, we have not just gathered as friends and fellow worshippers. We are the family of God. He is our Father, we are brothers and sisters in His family.

In our family joys and congregational joys we give thanks to God. In our family and congregational sorrows we give thanks to God for His victory over death through His Son Jesus Christ dying and rising to forgive our sins, to reconcile us to the Father, and to give us His Holy Spirit and eternal life through baptism and faith.

These actions of Jesus are spelled out by Paul in Acts 13:27–31. He plainly states that Jesus was wrongfully killed by the rulers in Jerusalem in fulfillment of the Scriptures, but God raised Him from the dead. But notice what Paul says right before sharing the Gospel story and what he says right after it.

Paul wants them to see that the community of believers is a family—God’s family, so he sandwiches the retelling of what Jesus did between two statements, two family promises. Before Paul explains Jesus’ innocent suffering and death and His resurrection, he claims the people there as his family. Not only were they his family, but the Gospel was specifically for them. After Paul explains Jesus dying and rising, he again claims the congregation as his family and reasserts that the Gospel is specifically for them.

And so will I. My dear family, my brothers and sisters, my mothers and fathers, the Gospel is specifically for you. The way Paul puts it in Acts 13:26 is, “Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent.” He addresses them as family, and makes the Gospel not just a general statement about God’s grace and love, but specifically applies it to them when he says, “to you the word of this salvation has been sent.” Then for a few verses he recounts Christ’s life, death, and resurrection and then reiterates the family promises of God in verse thirty-two, “And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. ³³ God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus.”

If anyone had come to the synagogue that day thinking the good news wasn’t for them, or that they probably wouldn’t get anything out of the message, Paul dismisses those objections

right away. The good news was specifically sent to that congregation, and what those folks were going to get out of the message was salvation through faith in God's Word.

And it is the same today. It's God who establishes congregations as He gathers believers together regularly around the preaching of His Word, the receiving of the Sacraments, the fellowship, and prayer. And it's God who is active even now as His Word goes forth even from my mouth.

His Word of Gospel has come specifically to you and the forgiveness of sins is specifically for you. You cannot rightly exclude yourself from it. It's for you. Jesus died for you, to forgive your sins. Jesus rose for you, to give you life and salvation in His name.

If you are ever tempted to think, "it's too good to be true," or "surely the pastor doesn't know all my sins, if he did he wouldn't be so sure that God's grace is really for me." Nonsense! God's grace is for you! It's not too good to be true—it's just very good and very true.

It is the height of arrogance against the promises of God to suggest that your sins weren't included in the forgiveness Christ won at the cross. God has promised—and His Word is true—that your sins, all of them, were nailed to the cross and you bear them no more. What can we say to all of this? We simply say, "Amen, thank you Lord Jesus, I believe."

When the Holy Spirit creates this faith in our hearts through the hearing of the powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ, we believe, we are saved, and we are adopted into His family as full and legitimate children. Paul calls us, "sons of the family of Abraham," in Acts 13:26, not only referring to the boys and men who believe, but to all believers, men and women, because you saints have a position of sonship with the Father. In the Bible the position of son was the position of the inheritor, the one who would receive from the Father all that belonged to the Father in the fullness of time.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, fellow members of God's family, salvation is for you. God's promises of salvation for you are delivered to you even in this sermon. His Word is powerful to save because through the Gospel the Holy Spirit delivers the forgiveness of Sins that Jesus won for you at the cross.

His Word is active as you read it, hear it, and meditate on it. His Word is active in the waters of Baptism and in the bread and cup of Holy Communion. His promises of salvation come to us through all of these means and are effective to make us His children—adopted members of His family by faith.

When Nick and Miriam had us over for Thanksgiving, we weren't there only as friends and fellow Thanksgiving observers. We were welcomed as family. Today in the congregation you aren't only friends and fellow worshippers of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. You are family. You belong. You are fellow inheritors of what comes from God the Father: forgiveness on account of Christ's death and resurrection, eternal life, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and even the gift of brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers in the congregation.

As you rejoice in these family promises from God, your Father, may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.