

JUNE 8, 2025

# Marion weekly update

## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*SERMON June 1 - Genesis 1:8, 15-22, Genesis 8:15-19, Matthew 12:46-50*

The past couple weeks we've had the messages dial in on one another and get a little more specific each go. We've considered ideas scripturally, and ultimately very practically. The first week we looked at the devil. Last week we got a little more specific about our contending with the devil in unpacking the common expression "hedge of protection". This week we get even more specific with one of the ideas the helps form that hedge.

A part of living faithfully and guarding against temptation is having a circle of people who keep us honest. These are people we trust, and who share our sense of faith and striving to live rightly before God. We trust them to encourage us in the things that are right, challenge us when we seem to be going astray, and hold us accountable when we are leaning towards making bad and wrong choices. They are God's instruments in our life journey.

Part of that kind of circle is often family. The idea of family is a little squirrely. It is so because of the myriad and even inconsistent ways in which the term is used.

Family is our blood relations, though some say that just blood doesn't make someone family. Family is those who raised us. This distinction is important for those of us who are adopted or fostered. We refer to close friend as family. Work groups, teams, and other gatherings are referred to as brotherhoods or sisterhoods.

Family language is used in religious circles, which we'll get to more soon.

Family can lead to extended and generous grace. "Why do we put up with so and so's name your aggravation here?" "Because they are family."

It can be unhealthy in forcing us to suffer in silence. Often abusive situations are hushed up because we "don't talk to others about family business." It impedes people from helping sometimes because "family matters are none of our business."

Sometimes the bonds of family are shattered by differences. More and more we hear about families breaking over social and political differences. Parents disown children and children disown parents over things like sexual orientation.

Family is an incredibly textured thing. Where one family might have uncommon compassion for one another, another may have uncommon hostility.

Where some are loyal to a fault, others might see loyal as nothing more than another matter of convenience.

We see family terms in our Christian communities and faith. God is "father". Jesus is "son". We are fellow "heirs with Christ" which implies a siblinghood with Jesus. We call one another "brother and sister". We refer to "mothers" and "fathers" in the faith.

Ideas of family bleed into one another. Where scripture calls us to a unity with others of like faith, we've found reason on reason to exclude people with whom we disagree on matters of faith and not include them in any sense of family.

We say "we're all God's children", yet speaking with another pastor I heard a very indignant response to people of other faiths or atheists that "they're no brother or sister of mine". Though I'd almost bet that language would change were he to serve with some of those individuals in something like a fire company.

Paul has an interesting take on who are brothers and sisters. In Galatians he writes that Abraham's children are those who have come to faith in Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile. It's faith not family history.

When asked about his family Jesus claimed that "anyone who does the will of my father in heaven" is family. There's an interesting thing to note here. What Jesus was talking about wasn't being a Christian. Christians didn't exist then. He was talking about right action. I wonder what that would look like today.

In today's world there are nonbelievers who seem to consistently act more in line with God's will than many Christians.

If we are looking at genetics we have to ask how literally we take the accounts in Genesis. If we believe that Adam and Eve were the literal first people, then we are all related if we go far enough back. This is further underscored with the story of Noah. If he and his family were the only ones alive after the great flood we also all are related in Noah.

So what gives? Are we family? Are we not? Is it somewhere in between and if so who counts and who doesn't?

I'd like to suggest that if we want the simplest answer, it lies in scripture, but not the ones we might suspect. It isn't in labels. It isn't in genealogies. As it should be, it's in Jesus.

We see our relationship with Jesus in very familial terms. We are siblings in inheritance. As part of the Godhead we are children to parent. Matthew 25 tells us all we need to know.

Jesus talks about our duty to meet the needs of anyone we come across who has a need. If we are being truthful, everyone is in need of something. It might not be food, clothing, or shelter. There are other needs just as significant. People need compassion. They need to feel heard and seen. They need loved.

There is no exclusion as to whom we are to serve. And here's the real kicker.

Jesus says that any time we see someone in need, we see Him.

Every person we help or neglect it's Jesus. Every person we hurt with careless words or uplift with grace is Jesus. Every person we dismiss or mistreat, that we embrace or heal, that's Jesus. Jesus is everyone.

We are family with everyone. Like it or not.

Some of us get this more readily than others. I recently was asked to officiate a funeral for a woman who was not actively connected to a church when she passed. I met with her brother at Hardee's to learn about her life. One of the first things he said was this:

"If she had bumped into you at the counter when you were ordering, you wouldn't have been a stranger." This was a woman who had no desire to be divided from anyone. I she met you, she wanted to know you. That was it.

This is a spirit of understanding that we are family with each and every person.

Astronauts are known to have a unique perspective on this when seeing the earth from space. It is called the overview effect:

The Overview Effect is a cognitive shift that affects some astronauts when they see the earth from space. Many say they no longer identify with a specific nationality or culture after seeing earth from outer space, instead they see themselves, and all citizens on earth, as one people, living on one world. The Overview Effect has been documented by numerous astronauts and cosmonauts, who describe seeing the Earth from in space first-hand like seeing "a tiny, fragile ball of life hanging in the void, shielded and nourished by a paper-thin atmosphere."

From space, astronauts cannot see physical borderlines or national boundaries, all evidence of division and separateness vanishes. The conflicts that divide countries, cultures and people become less important, and the need to create a peaceful united planetary society, which works together to protect this "pale blue dot," becomes critical.

"There was a startling recognition that the nature of the universe was not as I had been taught... I not only saw the connectedness, I felt it.... I was overwhelmed with the sensation of physically and mentally extending out into the cosmos. I realized that this was a biological response of my brain attempting to reorganize and give meaning to information about the wonderful and awesome processes that I was privileged to view." – Edgar Mitchell, sixth man on the moon.

In our faith, we do well to keep this perspective in mind. If everyone we meet is Jesus, everyone we meet is family. The labels that we create to categorize and divide us don't really matter. We are bound through our faith and before God to love one another as truly brothers and sisters.

Seeing one another this way makes things a lot easier... and harder. The question of who I am supposed to treat with the grace and acceptance of family is no longer a question. It's everyone. The hard part comes in getting over myself to make this happen in action.