

Call to Worship Genesis 1:26-28:17:1-2

Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the live stock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth."

God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it.

When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai.

Walk with me and be trustworthy. I will make a covenant between us and I will give you many, many descendants."

Prayer of Invocation

Compassionate God, we your people come to you with imperfections and ills of body and mind, heart and soul. We come seeking your healing; we come dependent on your grace, and trusting in your love. Grant us awareness of your presence in this hour of worship, as we praise you and surrendering ourselves into your compassionate hands, praying to be transformed according to your will. Amen.

The Word

I Timothy 5:1-8

The Message

The Family of Faith

Don't be harsh or impatient with an older man. Talk to him as you would your own father, and to the younger men as your brothers. Reverently honor an older woman as you would your mother, and the younger women as sisters.

Take care of widows who are destitute. If a widow has family members to take care of her, let them learn that religion begins at their own doorstep and that they should pay back with gratitude some of what they have received. This pleases God immensely.

You can tell a legitimate widow by the way she has put all her hope in God, praying to him constantly for the needs of others as well as her own. But a widow who exploits people's emotions and pocketbooks— well, there's nothing to her.

Tell these things to the people so that they will do the right thing in their extended family.

Anyone who neglects to care for family members in need denies the faith. That's worse than refusing to believe in the first place.

Living the Word

It is interesting to me how my mind works. I was exploring online looking for a way to relate the strength that family can be to begin this sermon. I was distracted by an article about kinds of metals. Well, let me tell you: Copper is a pure metal, without any additives. Just like the blood of family – 'our kin.'

But copper is also a soft metal, so when we have a situation that needs more strength, something is added to make it another kind of metal – Brass or Bronze. Bronze is an alloy consisting primarily of copper, commonly with about 12% tin and often with the addition of other metals (such as aluminum, manganese, nickel or zinc).

These additions produce a range of alloys that may be harder than copper alone, or have other useful properties, such as stiffness. Stronger than just blood family, because we have added more people to the family, they are fondly known as 'our Kith.'

I told someone the beginning of the week that this would be one of those mushy sermons as we talk lovingly about family. But God and I had a talk and we decided it wouldn't be fair to you if I just talked about the easy parts of being a family. Then you would have nothing to take home for the week but a warm fuzzy feeling or some of you might have felt gyped or betrayed because your family isn't always warm and fuzzy...

So beginning with our Kin: I know that we **all** love **all** of our blood relatives, yet some of them, or sometimes, they seem like someone got the genes mixed up and sent our family - one from someone else's family...

I have often been called 'unique' in my personality – my family might say 'she's a little different from everyone else; it's ok because I like being 'unique' and a 'little different.'

We are all created different, so why would we expect to all see things in the same way? Do you remember the story in Genesis 37 of Jacob's twelve sons, including Joseph? (vs. 3-11, 18-20,26-28)

"Now [Jacob] loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he was born when Jacob was old. Jacob had made for him a [colorful] robe. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him and couldn't even talk nicely to him.

Joseph had a dream and told it to his brothers, which made them hate him even more. He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had. When we were binding stalks of grain in the field, my stalk got up and stood upright, while your stalks gathered around it and bowed down to my stalk." His brothers said to him, "Will you really be our king and rule over us?" So, they hated him even more because of the dreams he told them.

Then Joseph had another dream and described it to his brothers: "I've just dreamed again, and this time the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." When he described it to his father and brothers, his father scolded him and said to him,

"What kind of dreams have you dreamed? Am I and your mother and your brothers supposed to come and bow down to the ground in front of you?" His brothers were jealous of him, but his father took careful note of the matter.

While tending the sheep, they saw Joseph in the distance before he got close to them, and they plotted to kill him. The brothers said to each other, "Here comes the big dreamer. Come on now, let's kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns, and we'll say a wild animal devoured him. Then we will see what becomes of his dreams!"

Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain if we kill our brother and hide his blood? Come on, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites. Let's not harm him because he's our brother; he's family." His brothers agreed. When some Midianite traders passed by, they pulled Joseph up out of the cistern. They sold him... for twenty pieces of silver, and they brought Joseph to Egypt."

Family may not always seem like a blessing, but then we have to work at not letting money or words or our uniqueness divide us. There, is something to ponder this week: Am I blessed by all of the people God gave me through my birth?

Twenty-five years ago, I was selling books in my very own bookstore and I stumbled upon the thickest novel that I ever read – and I am an avid reader. It was a book by Edward Rutherfurd entitled 'Sarum.'

"Set in the magical landscape of Stonehenge (England) and the cathedral city of Salisbury, SARUM is an epic story of five families from the Ice Age to the present day." That would be at least 10,000 years (no wonder it is a thick book).

What I loved about the book was that Rutherford carries these five families, their character and physical traits through the generations for all of those years. I remember that one of the men had a genetically deformed foot, which continued through the ages – generation to generation; another man had a terrible anger issue which played out over and over through time.

It can be that way with our kin. Some of the parts of who we are, we have inherited. Can they be altered or changed for something better? Many good and bad traits are cycles that can be altered or changed. As in anger it may be learning how to manage and cope with it. Other things may take intentionally seeing the problem or issues connected and making a conscious decision not to let it happen again.

My maternal grandmother was married three times in her life, divorced twice. If there was fault in grandma, it was that she chose unwisely as to mates. I believe she lived as long as she could in difficult situations before her relationships ended and she lived single for times in between. Her parents also had divorced when she was growing up and she knew life with a difficult step-father.

Even in bad relationships there is usually some good... Grandma birthed five girls, one died young of illness, but the other four all had, or have long married relationships. My mother took care when she chose my dad for her spouse. She intentionally wanted to break the cycle that had gone before her. I'm not judging divorce as bad, but just giving you a personal example of how one difficult situation was able to be turned around, though it had gone on for generations.

Here is another thing to ponder this week: Are the family traits or traditions I have inherited things that I don't want to pass on?

Now we move to our Kith: Those we claim as family even though they were born into another family.

1. Those that become family by marriage – sometimes it takes a while to accept the in-laws and the outlaws into the family, but they come with the package and now are family. Our choice is, will we allow them to be a part of our intimate group or will we leave them out?
2. Those who became family by sharing meals – Something can happen when you sit table with others. When I was growing up it was a custom in our farm home to invite the foreign students from UWRF, who visited our church, home for Sunday dinner and a sharing of cultures.

I don't remember any of their names, but I remember learning about Sierra Leone from one of them and searching the encyclopedias after he left to learn more about the home of my African brother. This speaks to us all as the family of Christians, who share the bread and cup, which brings us together from all over the world.

3. Those who become family by co-residence - How many of you have had a roommate at some point who became part of your family by virtue of having lived through pieces of your journey with you? I went to college in River Falls – 5 miles from my home. Most of my friends came to the farm with me during those years. They were good, as friends, but the ones who invited me back to their homes to meet their families in Merrill and Waukesha...they became family.

4. Those who become family through Baptism into the family of Christ. Some we don't know well, but we commit to them that we will be the family of Jesus with and for them. Ten years ago a couple came to me and asked me to marry them at the Lake Street UMC in Eau Claire. I said yes, even though I didn't know them, because I knew that they would have to go through pre-marriage sessions with me before the wedding.

They survived our sessions, were married and called me again a year later when their daughter, Nora was born to ask about baptism. Then 3 ½ years later, I was at New Richmond UMC, and they had moved as well. I baptized and committed to Evelyn, their second child. They are still my extended family from California.

Jesus told us in Matthew 28:19 "*Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" Hayward is a very open church family. Not all churches are. I have been told that people feel welcome when they enter here.

We have been good about welcoming those who come through the door and ask to be a part of our family, but Jesus asks us to go out and make family of those who may not walk in through our door. Are we willing to do that?

5. Those who become family through need of a family. Fifteen years ago, a friend of my boys, a man named Howie walked right into our family. he hangs out with my sons, Jeff & Donald. He has deep discussions with Bob and always spends time just asking me how I am doing. He is Uncle Howie to Oliver, and he is always willing to dig in and help with anything that needs to be done.

One day Bob told someone that Howie was our adopted son. I chuckled and said that I didn't remember signing any papers...but I am thankful for his presence in our lives and now even in our Christmas pictures and family phone contract! We are so blessed by his presence as a part of our family.

There may be a person out there just waiting to be brought into a family...could it be your family? Be blessed by the people that God brings into your life...and consider if they could become part of your family.

I hope that this morning brought you some things to ponder as well as some warm fuzzies... two more comments about Copper that you may or may not have known: Copper turns green when moisture is in continual contact with the copper.

The major factors that control the initial rate of attack on copper, and that cause copper to turn green, are moisture, temperature, and the level of pollution. Second, Copper is essential to all living organisms as a trace dietary mineral because it is a key constituent of the respiratory enzyme complex. The main areas where copper is found in humans are our liver, muscle and bone.

So, like all good things, copper can deteriorate, just as we do. To compare copper to family, may be a stretch, except to say that like copper if the family unit isn't cared for and intentionally preserved, it can slowly disappear, but if family grows and is nurtured then it is the truest blessing.