

“Family Resemblance”

Dear Friends, Greetings this morning in the name of our Lord Jesus and a special welcome (on this Mother's day) to all of you (here today) who are Mom's.

I don't know if it was this way for you (or not), but it seems like it happens more often than not. I still remember with our four kids (when they were born) how, one of the first things we did was to try to figure out the family resemblance. Did you do that when your kids were born, you tried to figure out who they looked like the most?

“He looks just like his grandpa!”(I still remember it.) “She looks just her grandma did when she was little.” “This little baby looks just like her mother.” “This little boy looks just like his dad!” For whatever reason, we want to find the resemblance. We try to figure out (early on) who this (new child in the family) resembles the most.

What's interesting (when it comes to family resemblance) is that it's not just those newborn characteristics that stand out, those physical qualities that make the connection between one family member and another. It's also the resemblance (in the family) that continues to show up as the habits and the values and the way a person does things in life are developed.

“Did you see what she just did? The way she did that was just like her Mom!” Did you hear what he just said (and the way he said it)? It sounded just like his Dad!”

Family resemblance goes deep, so much so that it's not just the good qualities and characteristics in life, the ones we hope our children learn and develop (and inherit) from us that are passed on, but also (and far too often) the ones we hope that are not. And therein lies one of the inherent challenges in parenting, and therein is found one of the inherent challenges in the Christian life.

Let's turn to our text. The story we read today is one that comes at the end of Jesus' earthly life. After three and a half years with his followers, Jesus' life on this earth is soon to come to an end. It's on the last night before our Lord was to go to the cross. He'd just finished his last supper with his disciples. He'd just washed all 24 of those 12 disciples' feet. He'd given them a command. He'd told them what mattered most. And then, in the words of our text today, he pointed out a family resemblance between (he and his Father) that he hoped they would never forget.

As you read those first 14 verses, (in chapter 14) of John's gospel, it's hard not to notice the overwhelming connection between the identity of Jesus and the identity of God. This Father-Son relationship is presented (and defined) for us in a variety of ways. Jesus talks about his Father's house. He says that he is going there to prepare a place for his disciples. He is the way to the Father (he says), and even more directly, (he says), to know him is to know the Father.

He is in the Father and Father is in him. He speaks on the Father's authority. He does what the Father has asked. In 14 verses, the word “Father” is used 13 times. There is a tremendous family resemblance between Jesus as the Son and God as the Father.

Now, I don't want to spend a lot of time with this, but this is one of the distinguishing marks between the Christian faith and every other religion of the world. (We've said this before.) No other religion makes the claims about its leader that the Christian faith makes. No other person has even dared to speak about himself as Jesus did.

Imagine what it must have been like for those first followers, even after the years they had spent. Here's a man, here's a brother, here's a friend; walking this earth just like they, who talks about coming from the Father, returning to the Father, promising to come again and take them to himself, that to see him is to see God, that he (in his very person) is “the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.”

How do you deal with such a claim? How does one make such a claim? You don't and you can't...unless it's actually true. There's no middle ground when it comes to Jesus. There's no halfway (take it or leave it) commitment when it comes to accepting the person of Christ.

Don't miss the importance of what's being said in this chapter. This is more than an academic discussion about the nature of God and who this God might be. It's more than a philosophical debate about, (if

there is a God), what this God might be like. There's a similarity between Jesus and the Father that goes far beyond things that are similar. There's a family resemblance you cannot deny, unless you choose to deny the resemblance in the family Jesus claims.

Now, (having said that), there are a lot of crazy things people have done with the claims of Jesus and their response to it. And, when I say "crazy", I don't mean those who have looked closely at the Christian faith and decided against it. If nothing else, (to their credit), at least they have taken a close and a careful look. The craziness comes in when people look at what Jesus claims (and has done) and then (from there) go on to construct (for themselves) what ends up being a religion of their own making (under the guise of calling it Christian) when, as a result of what they have done, it no longer is.

A little bit of this, a little bit of that; take what you want (and what you like) and call it good? You cannot do that with Jesus. You cannot pick and choose what you want, and think that you still have it. You can't take half of the claims (and teachings) of our faith and end up with the whole. If you take half of Christ, you end up with none of Christ. All that's left is a half-baked, warmed-over version of what any (and every) other religion in this world offers.

All of that to say, the Christian faith is not a belief system based upon a set of rules. It's a living and a daily and an ongoing relationship with the One in whom we see God himself. As followers of Jesus, we cannot separate the teachings and the actions of Christ from his person, who he said he was. They are a whole. They cannot be separated. Throw out this fourteenth chapter of John (or ignore it), and the Christian faith loses not only its uniqueness, but its power.

Now, in my own "craziness", I've often wondered why God doesn't just sit us down, put us in a room, (one at a time), close the door and say, "You're not going to leave until you make a decision. You don't get anything to eat and drink (and you can't walk out) until you come to a conclusion about what you actually believe about my Son. (It's that important.) When you've made your decision, you can get up and leave, no matter what you decide. (I've given you free will.) But you can't ignore it, and I'm not going to let you ignore him. Read through this chapter. Come to a conclusion for yourself. Listen to what he says (and to what he claims), and then decide. But no more ignoring it or explaining it away. I'll even take "No" as an answer, but you need to give an answer."

Now, God doesn't do that with us and, even in my "craziness", I'm glad he doesn't. But this is important. This fourteenth chapter, this family resemblance between Jesus (as the Son) and God (as the Father) is one we need to always keep in front of us.

Just think about how what we teach and believe ties so closely with this relationship Jesus has with the Father. Because of who Jesus was (as God's Son), he was able to save us from our sin. Because of who Jesus is, he is able to wash us clean and set us free. He died. He rose. (You know the story.) He's gone back into heaven.

This is no child's play, what we teach. This is no "Just sit back and smile and love your neighbor" moral code. (It's more than that, far more than that.)

Because of who Jesus was (and is), as both God and man, he is the only one who can be the perfect mediator between God and man. This is the Son of God, come from heaven to earth, to bring us from earth to heaven. That's why who he is carries such great weight for us.

Now, I realize, a lot of what we've been saying (thus far) has been more on the theological level than the practical. (That's alright.) Our theology, what we believe about God, is important. Much of what is being taught (these days) goes a mile wide and an inch deep. We dare not allow our theology to get watered down. We cannot lose our depth. At the same time, we cannot let our theology remain only on the theological level. It needs to also find application in our lives.

So, let's shift gears (for just a few moments) and talk about the ways in which this family resemblance between Jesus and his Father impact the family resemblance you and I are to have with Christ. As followers of his, there are meant to be qualities in our lives that are to be so evident that when others look at us, what they will inevitably see is him. Just as with a parent and a child, you look at one and you see the other, so are our lives to be a resemblance of his.

Now, this text today is loaded and we could spend all day digging into it and going deep. Let me keep it simple and (very quickly) give you three practical ways, as a result of our Lord's relationship to his Father, in which our lives can resemble his, by lifting up three simple verses.

Here's the first: "Let not your hearts be troubled." ("Let not your hearts be troubled.") Do you think the world needs that counsel today? Do you think you need that counsel (in your world) today?

For whatever reasons, in spite of our affluence, in spite of the many things we have, there is an underlying uneasiness (and anxiety) in the lives of many. A faster-paced life, a more frantic and driven desire to get ahead, in our pursuit of an elusive happiness, the results are all around us.

Broken relationships, troubled marriages, families that are so spread out and so busy, chasing after things they think (in life) they can't live without. What ends up happening is they end up missing out on the things in life that finally matter. And they wonder why it's never enough? They can't figure out why they're never quite yet there.

"Let not your hearts be troubled." When Jesus spoke those words, the disciples had good reason to be troubled. Their Lord was about to die. All they had lived (and worked for) was about to end.

What does Jesus tell them? He tells them, "Trust in God; trust also in me." Maybe that's too simple? Do you suppose that message is outdated? Do you think, even though it may have worked for those first-century followers (thousands of years ago), do you think it still works for us today?

My friends, don't be misled by the world. The message Jesus gives us is simple, but it is not simplistic. It's not complicated, but it's not naïve. It's timeless.

Jesus doesn't pretend (for a moment) that you and I (as Christians) will avoid troubles. (Not at all.) In fact, what he says is that we will have them. (They're going to happen.) But he tells us (when they happen) not to be afraid.

Even if that thing you worry about actually happens (and we spend far more time worrying about things that never will happen than we should), but even if it does, don't forget that you are a child of God. You belong to him. And because you belong to him, to the one who is the author and the keeper of all of life, you can live at peace.

That's the first: "Let not your hearts be troubled." Here's the second: "I will come again." ("I will come again.")

Now, some might say, "How is that relevant? Why does it matter that someday Jesus will come back? That's so much in the future. What does it have to do with here and now?"

Again, don't be misled. It has everything to do with here and now. Our anticipation for what's to come (and Jesus' promise that it will) are the very things that give meaning to the things in life we do.

Our future hope is not unrelated to what happens this afternoon and tomorrow. It is very much related. It adds excitement. It adds purpose. In many ways, it's the goal. And what's so beautiful (in the words of Jesus) is the way in which he defines what heaven will be.

Streets paved with gold, beautiful rivers and valleys and streams, abundant fruit trees and more golf courses than you can imagine...the fish just keep on biting! That's not what he says. What he says is "I will take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

To be with Jesus – that's heaven. Forget everything else for a moment. You and I will be with Christ. Not reading about him, not hearing about what he's done (and who he is), but being in his presence, face-to-face.

We need to live (each day) with that forward look. (We really do.) So much in life is lacking when there's no assurance of what is beyond the grave. That's what Easter is all about. And again, we need to emphasize: Don't separate the person of Christ (his resemblance to the Father) from our future hope. He is the One who can replace (what many would say is) nothing more than wishful thinking with an assured promise. "I will come again."

And then, third, Jesus said, "Greater works than these will you do." ("Greater works than these will you do.")

Now, that's (most certainly) a very practical statement, but how can that be? How can (you and I) do greater works than Jesus? Greater than walking on water? Greater than feeding the 5000? Greater than healing the sick? How can he say that?

Well, just think about it. Of all the things God does in this world, (and there are many), what is the greatest work God performs? Is it not the gift of eternal life, the winning of a person into the kingdom? When Jesus was here, he did many incredible things and, as a result, many came to believe. But since then, through the church, just think about the millions, if not billions, of people who have come to faith!

We need to be reminded, over and over again, that we are (as Paul puts it) “the body of Christ” in this world. That’s who we are. Christ’s work continues in this world through us. That’s how it happens. We are his body. Our strength is in him. And we are engaged (together) in those “greater works” of which he spoke.

My friends, don’t ever overestimate what you can accomplish in this life on your own; and don’t ever underestimate what God can accomplish in and through you. As you live out your faith (each day), in your family, among your friends, at work or at school, God is at work to carry out the greatest work this world will ever know.

And so let me close with this. When life on this earth begins and a new child is brought into this world, we all like to figure out the family resemblance. What if we changed that up and did the same thing when a person leaves this world and their life on this earth comes to a close? What if we approached life, from this day forward, as if the goal of our lives was to develop a family resemblance with Christ?

Do you know what? That is the goal of life. That’s exactly what God wants to see happen in you. And it can happen, in (and through) Jesus, because he was and he is and he will always be the only Son of God.

As a result, “Let not your hearts be troubled...Jesus will come again...and you and I can (and will) carry out “greater works than he,” as we place our faith and our trust in him.

How’s that for a start to a family resemblance with Jesus? And how about today as a starting point to start looking like him? Let’s pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for walking the path that led to the cross, for offering your life as a sacrifice so that we could have ours. We thank you, also, for calling us to be your people and for choosing us to be followers of yours.

Lord, we want to look like you. We want our lives to resemble yours. So work through your Spirit, to lead us to faith, to help us step out in faith, and to respond in faith, that when others look at our lives, they might see yours. It is in your name we pray. Amen.

9:00: Jesus is the only way to the Father...Hymn #464 (LBW)

10:30: What God has done for us, his loving grace, truly is a scandal...our next song