

All In The Family

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. Today, we focus on a parable of Jesus that describes a family. We know all about families. I am reminded about a sitcom that aired on CBS in the 70s. I would not miss an episode. It was called All in the Family. I know you remember it. Characters were Archie Bunker, Edith the saint, Gloria the daughter and her husband Mike (Meathead) Stivic. Quite the show. The Bunkers and their friends and neighbors debated war, religion, drugs, gun control, sex, gay rights, race relations, immigration, taxation, the environmental movement and anything else under the sun. I said that Edith was a saint. Not only for putting up with Archie, but also because in her core she was a forgiving caring person. Always looking for the best in people. One episode comes to my recollection.

It's a high school reunion and Edith wants to go. Archie agrees to attend only because he heard that Buck, the star athlete and old boy friend of Edith would be there. Archie meets Buck and to Archie's surprise Buck has gained about 150 pounds. He gets Edith and brings her over to Buck. Edith says "oh Buck you are still beautiful". Buck says, "how did you know me?" Edith - "your eyes. They are still caring. I can see into your soul". Archie grabs Edith away and says, "I don't get you Edith. You see a beautiful person and all I see is a fat, bald slob." "Yeah," Edith says. "Ain't that too bad."

Families - we know all about them. Most of us are a part of one. We also observe families. Some of these observations occur when we notice bumper stickers on the back of mini vans.

"I have an honor student at Neenah High School"

"I have an honor student at Hoover's 4K Program".

Sometimes the mini van has little decals, little stick figures.

There's a father looking big and strong, a mother pretty and petite, three little children, and a dog, you know the perfect family.

Kind of like the Garrison Keillor description of Lake Wobegon “where all the women are strong, all the men are good looking and all the children are above average.” But we know that’s not real. Real is a single mother or Dad with teenage struggles, financial hardships. Real is families struggling with no small amount of dysfunction.

I grew up in a four room apartment. Not four bedrooms but four rooms. We had little money, no car. On my block people yelled, fought. Kids were frequently in trouble, fathers often got drunk, and yet everyone went to church. Weekly. What forgiveness!!!

Today’s Gospel is about a family and forgiveness. Jesus had been in the small town of Bethany for a few days and all of the perfect people had been watching him closely. To the religious leaders he seemed to be attracting the wrong type of people.

“Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them”.

It was then that Jesus said – “Let me tell you a story.”

There was a couple who had two sons. Normal Jewish family. It was all good until one day, the younger son, the spoiled one, asked for his share of the inheritance now. Like yesterday. He didn’t want to wait for his cash, wanted it now. The father was hurt and probably offended but he did it anyway. He gave his son a boatload of cash and off goes the son and sets off on a journey. He engages in a life style of drinking and partying but of course the cash runs out. He gets a job feeding pigs, stomping around in the mud. Lousy lifestyle. So he ponders, maybe I should go back home. Would I be welcome? He even practices a phony speech. Over and over until he gets it right.

Let’s interrupt the story for a second. How do you think the Pharisees are feeling so far. They probably were very judgmental that a spoiled kid would ask for the death benefit even before the old man dies. And they were probably astonished that the father would give it to him. Not done. And the business about pigs. Pigs were animals a Jew could not even touch much less sleep with them. Then when

they hear that the kid is considering going home, they probably howl in laughter. You see in their perfect world, this kid was considered dead. Divorced from the family.

Jesus interrupts their laughter and continues the story. Before the kid even gets to the driveway to begin his canned, phony speech, the father runs to him, throws his arms around him and announces a party. He does three things that restore the relationship. Robe on his back - proper clothing for a household. Shoes on his feet - slaves don't wear shoes. And a ring on his finger - Family ring. A party is announced. It's a theme of forgiveness. Great story about a father and son and us.

Us and this place we call our church. To the Pharisees they had a hard time practicing forgiveness. They would have a hard time understanding our church. For them our church would appear dysfunctional. We are a collection of diversity, the rich and the not, the young and the old, the strong and the invalid. All of us seeking forgiveness. Our church is a place where we hardly agree on anything. We don't agree on politics, or gay rights, or if the Vikings are a real football team, or whether Lutefisk is an actual food group. But one thing we do agree upon is that we are in need of forgiveness and that we are called to be forgiving people.

Peter asked - how many times do I have to forgive that idiot. Jesus says 70 x 7 and he didn't mean 490. It means it doesn't stop.

I doubt if the Pharisees understood the parable. I hope we do. We are a forgiven people and because of that fact we can forgive others. Maybe we can be the kind of people where Edith Bunker will not say "yay , ain't that too bad"!

May your forgiveness touch many people.
Amen- let it be so.