

"Family without the White Picket Fence"  
Sermon Notes  
Rev. Kelly Jane Forbush  
First Church of East Hartford  
October 26, 2014

At my high school activities fair they sat the  
conservative Christian group next to the Gay-Straight Alliance.  
The two groups talked, in a friendly sort of way, throughout the fair.  
At the end, the conservative christian group said they would pray for the students in the GSA.  
Well, the students of the GSA weren't so sure if they wanted prayer.  
But, the conserv. christian group thought they were doing the most loving thing.

We are all familiar with the golden rule: love your neighbor as yourself

In the scripture this morning, Jesus says that  
all the laws and the prophets hang on the 2 commandments:  
to love God and love our neighbor as ourself.  
The understanding is that to love our neighbor is to love God.

Of course, the hard part is figuring out how to love our neighbor.  
Luckily, the Bible gives us some tips on how to love God and our neighbor:  
Jesus shows us in his life:  
radical hospitality and eating with outcasts.  
We also have the ten commandments.  
There is a Jewish Midrash:  
all the ten commandments are expressions of the first: to love God.  
One of those commandments is to honor one's parents.

This summer, I asked you to share your hopes.  
Many of you wrote something about your families.  
When I ask people what they are grateful for,  
many folks say something about their families.

While many find blessing in their families,  
families can also be a place of tension and hurt.  
Sometimes family is both a blessing and a source of struggle,  
sometimes it is a blessing because there has been struggle.

This is our second week of our "Seasons of Blessings"  
and the sermon series, "What Lifts You Up?"

This morning I invite you to look at the blessing of family,  
and to explore how we might love God through our families,  
especially families without white picket fences.

PRAYER

There is an exhibit called, "Love Makes a Family"

It features photographs of families with gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender members,

Each photograph is accompanied by a first person story of their family life.

It is a beautiful exhibit,

and the statement that "love makes a family" is true,

but I would make an addition to that statement:

"love makes a family, especially loving people you may not always like."

We have very little, if any, choice in who are family is.

We may have two loving parents, we may have multiple parents, we may have one parent.

We might get along with our siblings, we might not be speaking to them.

We might be an only child or an adopted child.

Your grandma may have baked you chocolate chip cookies,

or your grandmother may have scolded you for unknown reasons.

Sometimes babies are born before a marriage occurs - like our holy family!

Sometimes families have so much rift between them,

that certain members are utterly rejected.

This happens often in the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender community -

so much so, that the GLBT community often speaks of a second, "chosen" family -  
a group of close friends that serve as family because their own families have rejected them.

Families are messy and rarely are they picture-perfect.

Example: the family picture on my brochure was taken for my brother's graduation.

We are all lined up in ascending order, all smiles.

Getting to that picture looked like a scene from a sit-com.

Billy insisted on tracking down his suspenders.

Margaret didn't want to stand outside in the cold, but she refused to wear a sweater.

Elizabeth was chasing after the dog

and Eric thought the whole thing was ridiculous.

Eric is the brother closest to me in age and we didn't always get along.

By most traditional accounts he was the "problem child"

I was the perfectionist, straight A student.

He gave my Dad the opportunity to be on a first name basis with the town's superintendent

When we all went on vacation in 2012,

Eric and I fought.

I was old enough to rent a car, he was just a year too young.

He wanted to take a day trip snorkling

and I didn't want to wake up at 5am to drive him there.

It got so bad that he bought plane tickets to go back home early.....

when he announced it at dinner, everyone went up in arms,

and he stormed out.

That night I asked if we could go out - just the two of us.

We did.

We both knew the fight had nothing to do with the day trip.

We actually talked about what was really going on in our lives.

We shared our view of what happened growing up.

Realized how we had hurt each other -

and how we had tried to love one another.  
I forgave him and he forgave me.  
It took guts, honesty, openness.

But, I am immensely grateful that we had the opportunity to reconcile.  
Now I have a bro I can call and just hang out with.  
We can't choose our siblings,  
but they are one of the few people that can be with us our whole lives.

Eric and I aren't saints - we had some help pushing us back together

- we had both done enough growing up to have the conversation:
- we were both able to come to the table.
- [n.b. in some situations, like abuse, reconciliation might mean not engaging one another.]
- parents' encouragement to talk to each other
- partners' insights on how to be siblings
- years of practicing reconciliation and love, right here, in church.

Church was a place where I saw different people welcomed and loved -  
even if they didn't conform to a Norman Rockwell painting or  
look like one of those stock photos in the store frames.  
In Church I heard stories about Jesus sitting with the people society shunned.  
In Church I saw men in suits sitting with men with callus on their hands.  
In Church I heard testimony from people struggling with addiction.  
In Church, I realized that I don't need to be perfect to be loved.

Church is a unique place where we practice family love:  
loving people, even people we may not always like.

If we as a church are really following Jesus,  
the church will be made up of radically different people -  
and when you get radically different people together,  
there will be some difference of opinion.

The cool part is that in church when there are different opinions,  
it doesn't - or shouldn't- look like our current political debates.  
Church is where we practice listening and loving all sorts of people.

There are plenty of country-club churches,  
with lots of similar minded people.  
But church isn't a country-club,  
it's the Body of Christ -  
Jews and Greeks, male and female, insider and outsider,  
all God's children striving to love each other as one big family.

May we be open in mind, body, and spirit to the still small voice of God,  
beckoning us to love our neighbor and our families,  
and in so doing, follow the greatest commandment:  
To love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind and soul.  
Amen.