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Matthew 10:5-23
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Finding Family

Good Mourning Church Family.

Today's passage is a familiar one. Jesus sends the disciples out to proclaim the good news to the lost sheep of Israel. They should take little with them, instead of depending on the hospitality of others. This passage is soaked with wonderful one-liners,

Shake the dust off from your feet (10:14)

Be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves (10:16)

Sibling will betray sibling (10:21)

And especially ironic, since today is Father's Day, is the reference to parents and children betraying each other. So on this day of celebrating fathers, I am inspired by how some have good relationships with their fathers, while others have a tense relationship or are fatherless. And how today's passage gives us a glimpse of how we can all find family.

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you. Our heavenly father who embraces the fatherless.

In Jesus's time, the early Christians had to choose between their families and following Jesus. An impossible choice. But those who chose the Jesus way found a new family.

I wonder how many people can relate to that? Maybe leaving the mennonite brethren for this church made things tense with family. Maybe being from a military family made joining a pacifist church complicated. Well for myself, the tension I've seen is choosing between being who God created us to be and family expectations. There can be many things, but I'm talking about the choice between the slow poison of the closet, hiding being gay, and one's relationship to father, mother, grandparents, and siblings.

Goodness, the heart-wrenching stories I hear, grandma, will you still love me if I date boys? A Trans child not being invited to family dinners. Mom understands, but don't bring it up to your father. Someone who has been disowned by their entire family, so that no one showed up to their graduation from seminary. And yes, my ministry has also been filled with stories of families who embraced their children, taking the time to study the scriptures for themselves or learn gender-neutral pronouns. (Yes, the singular "they" is about 600 years old).

But what I do know about myself is that I wouldn't be brave enough to tell my father if I were gay.

deep breath

By the grace of God, I know that blood family is not the end of the story. Not for the disciples and not for us. Something that always fills my heart with joy is the group of middle-aged women and men at the Fresno pride parade with shirts that say, "free mom hugs" or "free dad hugs." That one of my best friends, that person who did not have any family coming to their seminary graduation, was able to give her tickets to parental figures from the church she was interning at. And she has been hired by a church that is excited about her gifts for ministry. That church embraces her and her wife as part of their church family.

I'm not telling you what to believe about gay people, even as I make my own affirming stance clear. That is another thing I love about this scripture passage. The disciples went from town to town, proclaiming the good news and healing people. If the town the disciples visit welcomes them, they should bless it. A blessing of peace, shalom. A blessing of health and prosperity. However, if the town does not accept them, they should leave, shaking the dust from their sandals. Then Jesus proclaims their fate will be worse than Sodom. The disciples do not force people to believe, even if the consequences for inhospitality are dire. This passage also shows how rejection goes both ways. In a time of persecution, the disciples needed to flee an inhospitable town because they feared for their lives.

The silver lining to this persecution is that the disciples were able to find family, were able to find hospitable towns, and form a community of like-minded people to honor Jesus and proclaim his good news together. That first the Jews, then the Gentiles, and finally us can be a part of that community of love is a miracle that does not erase persecution or the sins of the church. But I hope that it is an example that we all can follow. Will you join me?