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Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
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1 Samuel 8:4-22b, Mark 3:31-35
"We Are Family"

Commentators of the gospel story just read by John say that Jesus' mother and family must have been upset with Jesus' response. It sounds like a snub. But Mary's not surprised.

She had a sense of her son's unusual character and spiritual depth when he was lost as a boy in Jerusalem and they found him communicating with a group of learned Rabbis. It is said in scripture that Mary reflected upon the unusual aspects surrounding Jesus' life and his enlightenment at a young age and she treasured all these things in her heart. (Luke 2:41-52)

At the wedding of Cana the wine runs out and Mary tells Jesus about it. He says: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." And then he turns water into wine – metaphorically speaking. (John 2:1-12)

In today's story, Jesus is speaking to a crowd and is told that his mother, brothers and sisters are outside and he says, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God are my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:34-35)

I read this passage early in the week and I immediately thought of the disco hit sung by Sister Sledge, four sisters whose last name is Sledge: "We Are Family."

We are family
I got all my sisters with me
We are family
Get up ev'rybody and sing

Ev'ryone can see we're together
As we walk on by
and we fly just like birds of a feather
I won't tell no lie
all of the people around us they say
Can they be that close
Just let me state for the record
We're giving love in a family dose

Living life is fun and we've just begun
to get our share of the world's delights
High hopes we have for the future

And our goal's in sight
no we don't get depressed
Here's what we call our golden rule
Have faith in you and the things you do
You won't go wrong
This is our family Jewel

The Pittsburgh Pirates baseball team used the hit as their theme song in 1979. Led by Willie "Pops" Stargell, they came back from a 3 games to 1 deficit to defeat the Baltimore Orioles in the World Series. The song got constant airplay on Pittsburgh radio stations as the Pirates' season progressed. For the team, it represented players of different backgrounds coming together as one. The words "The Family" were printed on top of their dugout during the World Series.

The song and its adoption by the Pittsburgh Pirates and by many other groups interpret the gospel text today but it's a truncated interpretation. It relates to immediate families.

A more accurate interpretation is conveniently found in the "We Are Family Foundation" website. The explanation of themselves illustrates Jesus' words: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God are my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:34-35)

The "We Are Family Foundation" is a global family doing the will of God as we understand it. They say:

"Our coordinates don't matter.
We live in an age where technology makes us all virtual neighbours accessible at the click of a button.
Isn't it time we get to know one another?

"We are a population of seven billion plus and we are growing by 200,000 each day.
We are a world of 6,912 living languages, in 195 countries, on 1 planet that seems to be getting smaller and smaller. And that's the big issue.

"We are more alike than unlike...
We eat. We breathe. We sleep. We need water to live. We are friends, neighbours, children, parents, artists, teachers, leaders... We are global citizens. We are family (you know the song!)

"We face a few global problems that seem overwhelming: poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, natural and human-made disasters. How do we solve them? We work together across borders, oceans and boundaries of all kinds—share our knowledge and collaborate on a global scale. In fact, it is the only solution."

The "We Are Family Foundation" is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the vision of a global family by creating and supporting programs that inspire and educate the next generation about respect, understanding and cultural diversity while striving to solve some of our biggest global problems at the same time.

They build global coalitions, produce international teen summits (TED talks for teens), create worldwide curricula and build schools in countries with the highest illiteracy rates.

That's a modern interpretation of today's gospel text.

The "We Are Family" title to this sermon brings us to the baptism of Hunter today. In the baptism service Hunter's parents, Sal and Diana, Hunter's immediate family, promised to bring up their child in the love and compassion of God; and the congregation, Hunter's extended family, promised to love, encourage, and support Hunter, and with the parents to share the good news of the gospel with him, and to help him know and follow Christ.

It is wonderful to know that we have each other. We are sisters and brothers and mothers and fathers. We are "family" in the best sense of the word. Amen