

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
FAMILY MATTERS  
Luke 2:41-52  
DECEMBER 27, 2009  
8:45 & 11:00 A.M. SERVICES**

Generational issues are a part of being a family. Even in the very best of families there is tension. We know that because it happened even in Jesus' family. But why does family life become so problematic? We are often nicer to strangers than we are to our own family members. We do this because we take our families for granted and want to impress strangers. The real measure of our respect for other people, and our tolerance of them, is how we treat the people we live with every day. Every family is unique. And all families have problems.

In the middle years of the twentieth century the average family could be described as consisting of a father, a mother, and 1.6 children. Needless to say, this has changed. Today families vary or differ in every imaginable way. The term "**family**" is not very descriptive anymore, because every characteristic you might use to define a family could be met with a multitude of exceptions. All families do not have two parents. All families are certainly not middle-class. All families are not mono-racial or mono-ethnic. Few families have a stay-at-home parent. Many families have members who work from their homes. More and more families have step-parents. More and more families have same-sex couples. Fewer and fewer family members have the same last name. And it goes on and on. It has been said that there is only one thing that all families have in common; problems. All families have problems.

An adjective that is often used today with the noun "**family**" is "**dysfunctional.**" What is a dysfunctional family? Something is "dysfunctional" if it does not function according to its design, or if it does not work the way it is supposed to. By the definition, isn't every family at least a bit dysfunctional? Is there a family anywhere that works with the precision of a fine Swiss watch? And how would such a family differ from a group of robots? Isn't the idea of a perfect

family a little bit frightening? So, there seem to be three things we can say. **First**, “**family**” is very difficult to define. **Second**, there are no ordinary families. **Three**, all families have problems.

### **The simple miracle of communication.**

Take heart, even Jesus’ family had problems. This truth becomes evident during a trip, which sounds very contemporary! Mary, Joseph, and the young Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. Apparently everything went well until they started home. Somehow Jesus got left behind. And, somehow, no one noticed it until the end of the first day. Now today, Mary and Joseph would have been investigated by the authorities for parental neglect. People traveled in large caravans, and it was easy to assume that all of one’s family members were somewhere in the group. Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem and searched for three days before they found Jesus. A twelve-year-old boy is lost for four days? That sounds like a family problem. It sounds like what might happen to a family today. And today, Mary and Joseph would have been investigated by the authorities for parental neglect.

No one in the family deliberately caused this crisis. Jesus did not intend to worry his parents. Mary and Joseph had no intention of leaving the twelve-year-old in the city. The whole thing was a misunderstanding, probably a failure in communication. Maybe someone failed to talk, or maybe someone failed to listen. Can you imagine that Mary and Joseph travel all day without ever asking each other, “**Have you seen Jesus?**” Whatever the case may have been, it seems there could have been better communication. And that could be said of all families! How many family problems could be prevented or solved with better communication? If we would just talk and listen to each other! There are a thousand reasons why we don’t, most of them minor and relatively innocent.

There are three little sentences that can work miracles in most families, and each sentence has only three words. Even a child can say them. **First**, “**I was wrong.**” **Second**, “**I am sorry.**” **Third**, “**Please forgive me.**” The healing power of these three sentences is amazing. But they often go unsaid. Have you learned to you use these three sentences in your family? Some people have never heard us say: “**I was wrong,**” and many never will. That is tragic. But it is also dishonest. No one can live very long without being wrong many times. There can be no intimacy in relationships without honesty. Communication is essential in every family.

## **When silence is golden.**

Perhaps Mary, Joseph, and Jesus needed to have better communication, but apparently they did not use words as weapons. Think how easy it would have been for Mary and Joseph to play the blame game. Can't you hear a husband saying to his wife, or vice versa, **"This is all your fault. If you had been watching that child, like a parent is supposed to, this would not have happened. But, no, you were too busy visiting with your friends."** In the long history of human relationships blaming has never been known to solve a single problem. But it does tend to create a few. It drives a wedge between two people who, despite being in the same family, need to be friends!

Family members need to be friends. Even better, they need to be brothers and sisters in Christ. Sometimes the best thing you can do for a friend is listen, which usually means being quiet. Silence is not always a good thing, and in some situations may be cowardly or even cruel. But with friends and family members, silence, as opposed to blaming, is golden.

Every family on the face of the earth is unique and special. There are no ordinary families. But all families face some of the same problems. Where Christ is honored in a family there is both honesty and love. Either without the other, however, jeopardizes the concept of family.

As family members, all of us need to learn the discipline of putting ourselves in the other person's shoes. Whether we are thinking about conflicts between family members or the special needs of individuals in the family, there are few problems that cannot be resolved by simply seeing things from the other person's point of view. Understanding helps make love possible.

No family exists without tensions. Joseph and Mary had to learn how to live with their exceptional child. Every family faces the challenge of learning to live together in harmony while giving each person room to pursue his or her individual destiny.

Now teens today are better informed than previous generations. But there is still a mountain of misinformation out there about vital issues of importance to young people. Even more importantly, there are more temptations for today's youth than any generation before has had to confront. And even if a young person is equipped with all the knowledge in the world, there is that maturity gap.

Sometimes they need someone who is older, who has been there before, and now has the perspective to offer guidance. Admittedly, not every parent is a good guide to follow. Parents can be flawed. But it is vital to keep the lines of communication open. It is natural for there to be tension between the generations, but we need one another more than we can ever imagine.

If you want to be a part of a family that matters, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.

## PRAYER

O God, thank you for creating the family where we are schooled in trust and love that is required in all relationships. We pray that our families will be both fully human and truly holy:

That kindness will find room in our hearts, making our families centers of peace and love.

That parents will rear their children with both devotion and respect.

That children will recognize the gifts they have received from their parents.

That brothers and sisters will learn to celebrate as well as tolerate human differences.

That older relatives will not be moved aside when they become difficult to live with.

That God will guide all families in the paths of love and holiness.

O God, our heavenly Father, bind your people together in one family of faith, hope, and love. Help our human families to develop both the patience and the self-discipline to live together effectively and joyfully. Help our congregations to support and nurture its families that Christ may be honored in all our lives. In his name we pray. **Amen.**