

Study

How does Jesus' attitude to the family in the sermon make you feel? Why? Gal 4: 4-7; Heb 2: 11-17. What does this say about our relationship to Jesus? To each other? Luke 9: 57-62. Why is Jesus being so challenging here? How do you respond? 1 Tim 3:4-5; 1 Tim 5:8. What abuses of this understanding of Kingdom family do we need to avoid?

Living it out (Application):

Last week's question: How have you been dependent on God for material needs?

This week: Can you affirm three Christian friends in some way – in what way have they been a gift to you as family?

Coming Up at St Mark's

Questions about the plans...thank you for all questions that have been fed back. There is a document with some hopefully helpful responses available in the porch, or on the What Next for St Mark's website page. We will email it out with the next noticesheet as well.

If you are interested in exploring **whether you want to be involved in musical worship**, please see Andy Patrick, and he will be able to help...



Please pray for...

Good news from an email: " Anne-Marie Smith continues to grow stronger in her recovery from her brain haemorrhage every day. She is making the most of it! The doctors have been astounded by her progress. The power of prayer! Please could you send this message to members of the church family who have been praying for her? These continuing prayers are very much appreciated by us all."

Pray for the people of **Syria and of Egypt** – for peace and healing.

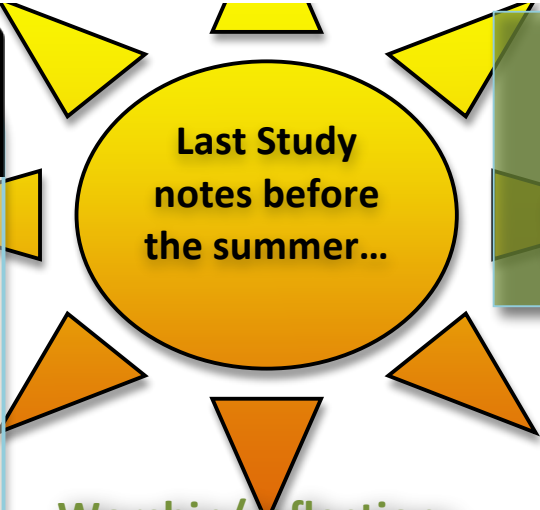
Pray for our upcoming **holiday club**, that all those involved, and those who come, could be led not into outer space, but into the grace and experience of God's love.

Continue to pray for **Andrea, David, Stephen, Ruth and Paul, and for Mike and Janet Moore** – for God's grace and presence in their lives.

Mission Partner Focus:

The Amani Christian training centre near Iringa Tanzania trains pastors and evangelists. Pray for the resourcing of the work there.

Thank you for your prayers for this church community!



Worship/reflection:

What was your experience of your family as you were growing up? Read Psalm 133, and thank God for those in the family of the church who have been significant to you in your journey walking the way of Jesus.

The Way of Jesus in families: Being a Kingdom family

On our journey along the way of Jesus, we have said that the second "key" relates to the two greatest commandments: love God and love others. Over this next season, before the summer and a little afterwards, we are going to be asking: How do we love those in our families? **Where does the family fit into the way of Jesus?** This will include things like: How do we deal with marriage pressures? Or the issues around being single? Or bringing up our children in a way that honours God? Or honouring our parents when they perhaps disappoint us or hurt us? As Christians, what do we even think about the shape of the family in a culture in which it is in a state of flux? Is the nuclear family a good or a bad thing? Or both? But before we get into all these issues, I want this week to try and get into how Jesus saw the family in terms of the kingdom of God. **Because everything we think, and every way in which we live, has to start here.**

So how did Jesus see it? **Was his main allegiance to his earthly, temporary family?** He certainly loved his mother - making sure she was looked after by John from the cross. And yet you don't have to read the Bible too closely to realise that Jesus saw his earthly family as only part of what it means to be in kingdom relationships with others, and he said things about it which must have been hard to receive in that culture, as well as in ours. On one occasion we read, "Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. **For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.**" Here, he clearly puts the family of God over the biological family.

Jesus' challenging attitude is getting to the heart of our identity - not only as Christians but as human beings. We all know we are born physically once - and from our parents we inherit a sense of who we are, of where we have come from, of how we relate to other people. **But for**

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 14th July 2013

the person who has submitted their life to Jesus there is another birth - Jesus talked about being “born again of water and the spirit”. We mark this with baptism, and during the baptism service we say, “We welcome you into the fellowship of faith; we are children of the same Heavenly Father; we welcome you.” In a general sense, of course, all people are children of God, in that He made them. **But when you surrender your life to Jesus you become a child of God in a specific way, and in a family which is orientated around the Kingdom.** That's why in John we read, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

Our first identity is that we are children of our Father. Not in a symbolic way, but in a real way. Later, in a letter John writes, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” And as if to emphasise the point he says, “And that is what we are!” Jesus loved his mother, and he loved Joseph, but his primary identity came from knowing he was a child of his Father in heaven. And similarly for us our primary eternal, true, profound identity is that we get so much from our earthly parents, but we get an eternal relationship of love with our Heavenly Father. You are a child of God, and God's image is being created in you, you have been born of the spirit, and this is nothing to do with your behaviour. You do not earn the right to be a child of God. You are a child of God.

And so if the person sitting next to you is a child of God, and you are a child of God, what does that make you to each other? It makes you brothers and sisters. The writer of Hebrews says, “For he who sanctifies (Jesus) and those who are sanctified (us!) all have one source (the Father). That is why he (Jesus) is not ashamed to call them (us!) brothers and sisters...” Jesus says he is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters. Writing to people who felt they were outsiders, Paul said in Ephesians, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household...” This is a family forever. This is a family greater and more significant than any other family. And this family’s primary concern is to honour our Father. So, because we are family, we pray together, “Our father in heaven.” May your name be honoured. Your kingdom come. Your will be done. Jesus said those who are his brothers and sisters are those who do the will of his Father.

This is difficult for us to process. And I believe that's why Jesus used such a strong language to emphasise that, while we are to love our families and serve them (The Scripture even says, “Anyone who does not look after his own relatives is denying the faith and is worse than an unbeliever...”) **yet he wants us to see every single relationship we have - with wife, husband, parent, child, brother, sister - in terms of the will of his Father, in the light of the Kingdom.** If we are to love each other in our families, then that will have to come after loving God first. And knowing our identity as brothers and sisters first.

I know this is challenging, but Jesus never set it up as a competition between our earthly family and our kingdom family. He never asks us to neglect, abuse, judge, or hurt our closest earthly relatives in His name. But he does call us to put the kingdom first.

But being part of the family of the Kingdom is a gift in so many ways....For example, what connects David Shreeve to prairie farmers in Canada? Well, a few years ago David was suffering from cancer and a friend of his in Canada ran a prayer group. This group was made up of

farmers who would travel for miles at 6 o'clock in the morning to come together to pray. David's friend asked them to pray for him. David, by God’s grace, recovered well. A few years later he went out to Canada, and while he was there asked if he could meet these farmers. They had never met each other, but David was able to stand there and say, “You prayed for me, and here I am. Thank you.” **We are given a family bigger, and more significant, than we can ever realise. A family united by Jesus across nations, across time, across the world.**

The kingdom family is also a **beautifully inclusive** family. A Spanish story tells about a father and son who became estranged from each other. The son left home, and the father later set out to find him. He searched for months with no success. Finally, in desperation, the father turned to the newspaper for help. His advert simply read, "Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father." On Saturday, 800 young men named Paco showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their estranged fathers. We live in an individualistic society where so many people do not fit into the traditional family. **So many feel lonely or excluded. The kingdom family is a community where all are accepted.** Where there are fathers for lost sons, brothers for lost brothers, mothers for hurting souls. You don't have to be a certain age, gender, background, or anything. You don't have to fit in. And, let's hope brothers and sisters, that you don't get judged. In the kingdom family it is not our job to judge, it is our job to reach out and accept. God is the judge of each of us - we are here to love one another and point one another to Him. **We are especially fond of sinners in this family. We will not judge you if you are a hypocrite.** We won't judge you if you are homophobic. Or gay. Or if you have failed. We won't judge you if you are greedy, or proud, or prone to gossip. We won't turn our back on you. Because in the kingdom family we are all children of grace.

To view our earthly families through the lens of the Kingdom is also a gift. If we can adopt the **mindset of seeing our husbands, wives, children, parents, brothers and sisters, through the lens of Jesus’ love, then we can increasingly begin to see them not only with our own eyes, but as God see them.** We can see them as people of ultimate worth to God. We can say to them, "I love you and I'm committed to you. But I'm committed to see you growing closer to your father who will be there for you long after I may have gone. I am committed most of all to seeing you grow closer to him, to loving him, to seeking his kingdom. I know all your faults - but I also know that you are a child of the King - forgiven by his grace.

Finally, **being rooted in the kingdom family will enable us to stop trying to make our earthly families into something that they can never be.** Our families are a beautiful gift from God, which He gives us responsibility for. **But we should not give them the responsibility of having to fulfil us.** We should not place an impossible burden on them. We cannot, in our earthly families, take the place of God for each other. This is why, if you want to love your family right, you need to love God first. Because then you will be able to entrust them to him. Then you will be able to let your children go, to let your siblings be who they are, to see the potential in someone who is so familiar to you. Jesus was able to love his mother properly, because in the end he loved the Kingdom most. However over the coming weeks we understand our earthly relatives and the relationships we have, it must be in the light of His kingdom.