

# This Is God's House, and We Are His Family: There's Only Room for Love!

A sermon based on 1 Peter 3:8-12

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You know I'm prone to sing in a sermon every once in a while, but today, I'll spare you. I do, however, have a song I would like to share with you, at least some of the lyrics. Listen closely and see if you can name the song.

"Everyone can see we're together as we walk on by and we fly just like birds of a feather; I'm telling no lie. All of the people around us to say can we be that close..." Do you have it yet? And the refrain goes..."We are family!" Alright, so now, hopefully you've got it.

You listen to that song and, if you didn't already know it was sung by 3 actual sisters, you could probably guess it. From the lyrics, they obviously sound like they like each other, work well together, give others the impression of a loving, caring family.

Would that be a good theme song for our congregation? We're part of the same family...yes, God's family, but more specifically, we're part of the Light of the World Lutheran family. So, of course, if we're part of God's family and a church family, that means we obviously like each other, work well together, give others the impression that we're a loving, caring family, right?

Over the next few weeks, as we begin to come to a close to the Pentecost season, a season focusing on outward changes in our lives that come from the change the Holy Spirit is constantly working in our hearts, we're going to focus on this family. When we're in here, in God's house, we're his family. When we're outside this house, we're still God's family. So, how should we act? Well, in this house, even more, in this family, there's only room for love.

Now, let's go back to the question I asked a few moments ago. For the Sledge Sisters, at least according to the song, people could tell they were family, that they liked each other, would even go as far as to say they loved each other. The question is, for this family, would others be able to say that same? In God's family, do we give others the impression that we like, and dare I say, that we love each other? Uh, yeah, sure, of course we do. We're Christians. We know God tells us we're supposed to love each other.

And yet, we know "should do" and "actually doing" are two completely different concepts. Like the child who says, "Yeah, I know I'm supposed to keep my room clean...I know I'm supposed to play nice with my sister," but come on, kids get dirty, they get mean. Not an excuse...but the reality.

Well, what should God's loving family look like? What impression should we be leaving on others, especially our Father? I think the apostle Peter has a pretty good list for us today.

"Finally..." is how he starts our list. If you look through 1 Peter, you notice Peter's in the giving relationship advice mood. Talks about how rulers and masters treat each other, which would be similar to our employer/employee relationships today. Talks about how husbands and wives love and honor each other. Then he gets to our section, where he discusses the other important relationship. It's the one you and I and everyone here shares with each other as members of God's family. The relationship which should be a reflection of our Father, the one "who called you out of darkness and into his

wonderful light”...the one who “have lavished [such great love] on us that we should be called children of God.”

So, back to the list. Here are the traits of God’s loving family: lives in harmony with one another, sympathetic, loving as brothers and sisters, compassionate, humble, refuses to repay evil with evil.

Take a moment and think about what each of those characteristics mean. What does it mean to live in harmony in God’s family? What does it mean to be sympathetic in God’s family? To love as siblings? To be compassionate, humble, refusing to repay evil in kind? Really, all of those can only mean one thing. In God’s house, in God’s family, there is only room for love.

Well, if that’s true...since it’s true, I think we need to call a family meeting. Let’s be real, we definitely aren’t the Cleaver family here. Unfortunately, even as a family of believers, of course we still have our spats. But it’s more serious than that. We try to bring something other than love into God’s house and into his family.

It’s loving to live in harmony with one another, to work together for the good of the family...to work together to do God’s work. But when I put up a big stink at meetings and drag my feet because the project I want is not getting down or won’t be getting down precisely to my liking (it doesn’t matter what others think)...that kind of selfish attitude is not loving.

It’s loving to be sympathetic, to care and be interested in others’ situations and problems, to try to put yourself in their shoes. But when I get frustrated and annoyed when a family might, on occasion, have a rowdy child in worship...might even give the glare or shake my head in disappointment, somehow forgetting that maybe my kids were once that way or even I, once upon a time, was that way...that’s not loving.

To love as brothers...and sisters, to want to have that kind of intimate, close-knit relationship with others. Would you tell your sibling, “Good, run away. This house would be better without you”? Would you tell your sibling here, “Good, leave this church. I couldn’t care less”? Is that love?

Do we even need to go on? Loving is being compassionate, being humbling, not repaying evil with evil. Loving is not being inconsiderate or arrogant. It’s not trying to get back at someone by gossiping about them and trying to ruin the good name God has given them. That’s not love, and so, there’s no room for it here, any of it, in God’s family. And yet, it still manages to find its way in through those doors.

Are you surprised? Well...yes and no. Yeah, we’re not surprised because we know there are very real struggles every church deals with. We’re not immune from it. But yeah, we should be surprised. Just because everyone else is doing it, does that give us a free pass, to act as enemies rather than friends, siblings?

On a show my wife and I were watching, there was this pregnant woman whose two sisters came to visit. They spent the whole time arguing, trying to one-up each other, and dragging each other down by pointing out their failures and shortcomings. The woman finally got fed up and pointed to her friends, saying, “These two are more sisters to me than you are.”

What if Jesus came in here, took one look, and said, “You know, the world out there, unbelievers are more loving, are more like siblings to each other than you are.” Ouch, how much would that hurt? But

it's the truth. We aren't always loving, even when our Father reminds us in his Word over and over again that this is how we should be.

How serious is God about this? Look at the Psalm 34, which Peter quotes in verses 10-12, "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous...but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." This is not just battling abstract ideas around. This isn't just fighting and being mean and seeing if we can do it without getting caught. This is reality. The choices you and I make in this family will determine whether we love our lives and will see good days or whether the face of the Lord would be against us.

How have we done? Certainly not perfection. We're sinful. And we know what that means. We ought to have Dad, God, come down on us and hard, "If you can't get along with each other, you'll not just have to go to your room. If you can't show love for each other, even in this family, go to your doom!"

The way we sometimes treat each other, that's not love. But this is. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

You know, in the military, there's often a comradery that develops amongst troops, as they train together, fight together, become battle-hardened together. It's not uncommon to hear them talk about fellow soldiers as being brothers, family, friends I wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice my life for.

In God's house and in this family, God's family, we have someone who loves us just like that...and even more. In this family, God saw how there wouldn't always be harmony and kindness and love here, so good ol' Dad, he took matters into his own hands. He didn't send us to our "rooms" and our doom. He sent his Son to us, instead.

And Jesus? He didn't just lay down his life for you, his friend. He lived, died, and rose for you, his brother. He lived, died, and rose for you, his sister. In this family, Jesus was the mediator. He knew things weren't good between us and God. He wanted there to be peace between us. So he did what needed to be done to create that peace. He lived the perfect life, where he was at peace with everyone...never got into arguments, never got mad, never spoke an unkind or hateful word.

He died. He laid down his life for his family. He jumped on the grenade of the cross, taking the death and punishment of hell that should have been ours and gave us his robe of righteousness instead. And he rose. He showed us the victory was complete. Jesus showed peace between us and our Father has been completely restored.

And it's that kind of loving peace Jesus wants for this family, and within this family. Look again at our verses, "Whoever would love life...must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it." Yeah, in our lives as fellow believers, it's a struggle to always be loving each other and be loving towards each other. It's a challenge to keep our tongues from evil and our lips from deceitful speech. But here's the solution: seek peace and pursue it.

We already have peace with God. Our brother won that for us. And now, our brother gives us the motivation and the power to be at peace with each other.

You know how the saying goes, "If you're not part of the solution, you must be part of the problem." Let's be done being the problem. Let's be the loving solution. Let's be different. Because the world out there, they're ok with speaking evil. They want to cause division. But we don't. The blessings of being part of God's family are simply too great to want to throw away for that.

Yes, the sin-sickness in our hearts leads to all kinds of snags in congregations: quarreling, coldness, resentment, pride, control obsession, turf protection, and the desire for revenge. The sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit changes our hearts and those attitudes, and here, Peter urges us to let the Spirit work the following qualities in our relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ:

Harmony – the conscious decision to work together with people, to suppress your own ego, adapting to their needs and wants. Sympathy – the conscious decision to be interested in someone else’s problems instead of just your own. Compassion – the conscious decision to open up your heart and feelings to another’s pain and trouble, to be tender and merciful with people. Humility – the conscious decision to think less of yourself and more of other people. Gentleness – the conscious decision not to play the “payback” game but rather to put away all thoughts of revenge and return words and actions that are kind.

It’s really all love, the Spirit-born decision to be willing to go out of your way and give of yourself in order to bring good things to someone else because we are family. We are God’s family!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it truly is a blessed privilege to be part of God’s family here. We have a Father who deeply loves us. We have a brother who laid down his life to save ours. And now, we have the opportunity to love each other, in all our thoughts, all our words, and all our actions. So, let’s not just give the impression that we like each other...that we love each other. By the grace of God, we do love each other, and it’ll show. Amen.