

Welcome Home...to the Community You Need!

A sermon based on Hebrews 2:9-18 - ***But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.***

¹⁰ In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. ¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. ¹² He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises. "

¹³ And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again he says,

"Here am I, and the children God has given me."

¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil- ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

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

"Welcome home!"

Does this place feel like home to you? Some of you, undoubtedly, would answer "Yes! This is where I'm comfortable. This place feels like a warm hug." Others of you, though, might answer, "Home?!? This is supposed to feel like home? It's never felt that way to me! I feel like a stranger. Sometimes, I even feel like I'm not wanted. No, this place doesn't feel anything like home to me."

It's an unfortunate reality, isn't it, in a place where Jesus gathers us, whom he calls his brothers and sisters – his spiritual family, and so here is home...yet here, again, it's unfortunate some of you would feel alienated from the rest of your Christian family.

It's sad, but it's reality. And I've been there. The first church I went to at the Seminary – the church I would be helping out at during my time there – and the first Sunday I went, no one greeted me. No one

said “hello.” They all kind of had their cliques...the group they would gravitate toward and not really branch out.

And then I came here...and have never once felt like I wasn't part of the family. And maybe you've had the experience, too. Or maybe not...and you feel like an outsider.

I know, it's easy to get into the mindset, especially if you're acclimated well here, “Well, if only they came more often, or would get more involved, or would come down to snacks after worship...they're not making the effort” as if it's ultimately their fault if they're not feeling like family...but you've done nothing to help them feel welcome and at ease here...not even so much as a “hi!” Is that family?

Or, maybe you have...you've invited them – multiple times - to come down or to a Bible study or GLOW event or project day or even just to worship more regularly, and almost every time it's a “no,” as if there's not time to spend with the family outside of worship. Is that family?

And not only that, but we argue (sometimes over silly items), we get angry, we hold on to grudges and refuse to forgive, we lie to each other, we gossip about one another. Is that family? Is that God's family?

Any of that...all of that is enough to push each other away, driving each other apart instead of coming closer together as God's family here...and, no surprise, it doesn't always feel like family here.

But it is. Whether we've done a good job of embracing this family and cultivating this family here or not, this is family...and this is home. And I'm glad you're here.

Why? Because it's where your brother promises to be...always. In our 2nd Lesson, we were told something remarkable. Do you remember? The eternal God of the universe is our brother. Isn't that incredible? The beginning of Hebrews – chapter 1 – is spent describing who our brother is. He is **“the heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2)**; the **“radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3)**; he **“sustains all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:3)**; the Father says of him, **“Let all God's angels worship him” (Hebrews 1:6)** and **“your throne will last forever and ever” (Hebrews 1:8)** and **“in the beginning, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands” (Hebrews 1:10)**.

To think *this one* counts himself as our brother is mind-blowing! Now, I know it's not the greatest example of morality, but did you ever see the Chevy Chase movie, “Christmas Vacation”? Throughout, we're introduced to Clark's crazy family – his down-and-out brother-in-law who drives a beat-up Winnebago, his raggedy niece and nephew, his snarky in-laws. You know, they say you can pick your friends, but you can't pick your family.

Yet, Jesus chooses us as his family? Amazing!

For us...and not only because of who Jesus is. Verse 9 reminds us who this brother of ours was willing to do for us. He humbled himself to the point of being viewed as **“lower than the angels for a little while.”**

Can you see it? The dumpster-diving God leaves his perfect, pristine, sinless heaven to be born into this dumpster called earth to search through the filth and rubbish of this fallen world...for me...and you. He's the Lord who chose to live with us...and not an extended weekend. He spent 33 years of what must have been an absolutely mind-numbing and revolting experience – the sinless among the sinful.

But this he did so he could ***“(bring) many sons and daughters to glory.”*** Jesus took our sin upon himself and did what we couldn’t do. And we get the forgiveness and holiness we so needed. And now, we get to bask in Jesus’ glory, as if it’s our own.

Actor Kevin Bacon once recounted his 6-year-old son seeing *Footloose* for the first time. He said, “Hey, Dad, you know that thing in the movie where you swing from the rafters of that building? That’s really cool, how did you do that?”

Kevin said, “Well, I didn’t do that part – it was a stunt man.”

“What’s a stunt man?” his son asked.

“That’s someone who dresses like me and does things I can’t do.”

“Oh,” he replied and walked out of the room, looking a little confused.

A little later, his son said, “Hey, Dad, you know that thing in the movie where you spin around on that gym bar and land on your feet? How did you do that?”

Again, Kevin said, “Well, I didn’t do that. It was a gymnastics double.”

“What’s a gymnastics double?” he asked.

“That’s a guy who dresses in my cloths and does things I can’t do.”

There was silence from his son, and then he asked in a concerned voice, “Dad, what did you do?”

“I got all the glory,” Kevin sheepishly replied.

Isn’t that how it is in this family...with Jesus? Our brother not only lived for the people of this world, but he ***“tasted death for everyone,”*** so we could have his glory.

And here’s the bombshell! ***“Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.”*** Many people are ashamed of their families. Maybe Dad is the town drunk. Perhaps Mom is a mess...or brother a little too friendly with too many women...or sister has been in trouble with the law more times than you can count. And, you’re ashamed...ashamed to admit your relationship...concerned about what others will think of you if they know you’re related to one of them. Or, maybe that’s how you feel about this family here...you’re ashamed of your Light of the World family, too ashamed to invite someone else to come and meet Jesus.

If ever there was a brother who had a right to be ashamed of his siblings, it’s Jesus. He ought to have disowned us long ago. He ought to hang his head in shame at even knowing us. We would.

But we’re not Jesus, and Jesus isn’t us. He’s the one who made us perfect through his suffering and his resurrection. He’s not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters because he’s made us holy in his sight. He’s as proud to call us brothers and sisters as someone whose sibling won a gold medal at the Olympics or was elected to office. He points to you and me and says, “This is my brother! Here’s my sister!”

And he is here with us this morning. As sure as I am standing in front of you, as sure as that person is seated next to you, Jesus is here. Listen again to what our verses from Hebrews quote Jesus as saying to

his Father, ***“I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.”*** Isn't that remarkable? Jesus is joining us in our worship this morning. Even as we praise him, he joins us in praising his Father.

No wonder we love to come to this place! Why do you think there are so many families in church on Mothers' Day? It's because children of Christian mothers know that nothing could mean more to her than for them to worship with her. Likewise – and on a much greater scale – nothing could give us more joy than worshiping with our brother, Jesus...here, where he wants us to be!

Of course, he's here to do more than be worshiped by us and worship with us. He's here to give to us – to give us his forgiveness so we need never fear his anger again, to give us the promise of eternal life so we need never fear death, to give us strength so we need never fear temptation. The gifts Jesus gives to his family in worship, through his Word, are so abundant...and needed.

The standing joke among the grandchildren was you'd better not eat before visiting grandma. Has that been your experience, too? She seemed incapable of allowing any of them to walk into her home without giving them something to eat. It was inevitable and it was inevitably good.

Our brother treats us the same. When we enter his house, he insists on feeding us. He knows precisely what our needs are and provides the spiritual nourishment to meet those needs. Like, in the Lord's Supper, where, in my opinion, there is some of the best and most vivid and most delicious gospel in that precious meal...what you're missing out on if you're not an active member of this family...if you're simply not here. Here, when you come, you're never going to go hungry.

You know, it's no wonder the grandchildren loved visiting grandma's house. And, it's no wonder Jesus' brothers and sisters love to visit his house.

Did you hear that? Jesus' brothers and sisters are here...meaning this is a place where your brothers and sisters are. Do you always think that way?

Now, if you were raised in a warm, loving family, the thought of coming home immediately brings joyful thoughts to mind. Some of my strongest memories were arriving home from after-school activities to the smell of fresh-baked bread roasted chicken coming out of the oven. My mom would just be finishing the mashed potatoes when we walked in the door. Within minutes, we were sitting down to a feast. My folks don't live in that house anymore, but I imagine walking into that house, it'd still feel warm and wonderful.

Not everyone was raised in such an environment, though. The thought of their childhood home brings feelings of sadness or loneliness or lovelessness.

In the same way, some of you have had wonderful experiences here in God's house. You have found caring and supportive brothers and sisters in Christ. You have found warmth and welcome. But, others of you maybe haven't. Maybe you've experienced unloving attitudes and actions. Maybe you've just felt like you didn't fit in. And this place has never felt like home.

We're working to change that culture here...which takes time...and effort...and can be a struggle. Society in general certainly doesn't help. I'm sure you can recognize our culture's tendency and shift toward isolation. People today don't know their neighbors. They leave for work, close the garage by

remote, and return to the same cocoon in the evening. They go out with friends or that special someone and spend 90% of their time buried in their phone.

Even here, some people don't connect with others at Sunday worship. Maybe they have the one or two familiar faces they have a quick chat with, but, for the most part, they come and go with a degree of anonymity – or at least without a deep connection to others. Again, we want to change that here.

But this is why “Welcome Home” Sunday affords us the opportunity to repent of our sins against our brothers and sisters in Christ. We beg forgiveness from Christ and from one another for every unkind and unloving thought, every hurtful word, every self-serving action. Were we so upset about something so silly as how this was done or songs were sung? Were we simply too selfish to consider how our words or actions impacted others. Were we too busy serving ourselves to think about how we might serve our Christian family around us? For all the ways we've failed to be the brothers and sisters God has called us to be, we repent.

And now, as our loving Lord assures us of his forgiveness, we look for opportunities to show his kind of love and forgiveness to our church family here...thinking, “Who is hurting? Who needs help? How can I serve? What can I do...for you?”

This attitude of love and service to our brothers and sisters creates the kind of home we all long for. It's a place where we can find encouragement as we face an increasingly host world, hope when we feel hopeless, and help when we feel helpless.

You see, we're not wired to exist as rugged individuals. We need each other. Look back at the creation account to see how God designed us to be this way...how his design is for us to be family in Christ.

You know, people often ask if someone can be a Christian without going to church. Technically, they could. But, when we consider who is here when we gather as we are this morning – our brother Jesus and our Christian brothers and sisters – why would anyone want to be a Christian without going to church? It would be like me asking if I can be a member of my family without ever visiting my parents' home. Technically, the answer is “yes.” But I can't for the life of me imagine why I would want to. And I think – and hope – you're the same way.

I was visiting Georgette. It was on behalf of that church I was helping out at the Seminary. She was a shut-in. She was physically unable to come to church. I remember we were saying the Lord's Prayer together. I looked at her and saw tears streaming from her eyes. I assumed it was the prayer – one she has said thousands of times, but still so meaningful to her...that she could remember it. But I still asked. “Jason, I miss church. I miss my family. I miss home.”

I'm fairly confident she's at home with Jesus now, but until then, I want the same for you. I want you home. I want this to be the place you'll make every excuse – not to avoid, but to be here..to hear the precious news of Jesus' love for you...to praise him for his saving work...to thank him for his goodness in your life...to join with and encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ, who care about you.

So, come on home. Your family is here. Your brother Jesus is here. And we are so eager and excited to say – and keep saying, “Welcome home!” Amen.

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