

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY MAY 8 2022

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"That Family"

Based on Psalm 23

Growing up, there was a family down the road that always caused my parents consternation. As serious old-school teachers, they were quite strict about after school activities, homework, bedtimes, and such. But this family always seemed to be on the go. The older teens had their own cars, and their friends had cars, and the family had two cars (which when I was young was still considered a bit extravagant where I grew up). People always seemed to be arriving home late or leaving in the wee dawn hours for work. My parents would "Tsk-tsk" as the noise and commotion would roar by the house, "That family!"

But one day, not too long ago, I looked out my front window. There was the family car, and then my precious Fiat squeezed into the driveway. There was Trent's car, his girlfriend's car, Tara's car, Colin's motorcycle, and my husband's motorcycle in the garage. When John came home with the 1973 Corvette, the neighbours started pulling back their kitchen curtains,

because you could hear him coming half a mile away. And then I realized, we had become "That Family!"

Family business is messy business. It's always been that way. It's just that many of the secrets, and indiscretions, and less than memorable moments that used to stay hidden behind closed doors, are more likely to end up on a Tik Tok video or a dash cam clip on the evening news these days.

But don't fool yourself. A quick flip through the first five books of the Old Testament will offer you more than sufficient stories for you to "Tsk, tsk" about. It's just that those who designed our worship schedules have tended to leave out the 'messy' parts so that it would appear to polite church going folk that 'good Christians' never get into those eyebrow raising predicaments that the rest of the world does. "Cause we be the good Christians, you know!"

But that is simply not true. Our lives and the families we represent here today in the pews, are no less messy that the lives of people we know

who don't have anything to do with the church. It's just that we've got God in the middle of the mess.

I would like to think that we as a church have gotten past the days when we would feel the pressure to arrive at church like a Norman Rockwell picture: Mother, hair neat and tidy, Father with his starched shirt and tie, son and daughter, so well behaved for the entire length of the service, sitting quietly in the family pew. But the legacy of the 'perfect family' lingers on out there in the world. Oddly enough, more people than we realize, pass us by, not because they aren't interested in God or faith, but because they think they don't look the part of the 'perfect family', good enough to be welcomed by us, but more importantly, good enough to be welcomed by God.

Our Psalm reading today is a familiar one, to those inside and outside the church. It is most often read as a psalm of comfort to those who grieve, as we have done this week to honour one of our church family who now rests in her heavenly home. It is a personal psalm, read to calm

ourselves when we are worried or fretting over something. Most often, we hear the words directed towards ourselves, 'me', 'I'.

This week, I read those words through the lens of a messy family. And to my surprise, those familiar phrases spoke to me in a new way.

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

There may not be a lot of money in the bank. There may not be a lot of food in the cupboard. Today might be a rough day, Lord. But, I have you. And I can make due with the rest.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,

At the end of the day, I have a place to rest, lay my head, put my feet up, read a good book, listen to some music, or watch Netflix. It's called my home.

He leads me beside quiet waters,

All through the day, God presents me with little glimpses of His glory, a splash of colour on a bird's wings, a small child's giggle, a text from an old friend. It's a gift. Try to remember to say thank-you.

He refreshes my soul.

God gives me pause during the day, to drink deeply of His presence. It may be only a moment, it may be an hour, but it can fuel me for days.

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

"Yes God, I hear you." You nudge me through the day, helping me make good choices, to make an effort for my family, encouraging me to try and try again, especially through those messy times.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

Somedays are tough. There is doubt. There is hurt. There is bad news. And there is really bad news. Sometimes such things pull family together. Sometimes such things pulls them apart. But you God, are the elastic band which can pull the pieces back into shape again.

I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

So often, fear rules the day. Fear of getting old. Losing independence. The changes just around the corner that are inevitable, but still plausibly deniable. Why can't things just stay the same? But you God, you are the same: yesterday, today, and tomorrow. You are there to steady me in my today.

You prepare a table before mein the presence of my enemies.

Sometimes there is anger. Sometimes a simmering hate. Disagreements, disturbing violence, unfairness, a lack of empathy, understanding, or care for one another. Although it is difficult to believe, yes, God is in the middle of this too. In those difficult moments He might be the only thing you can hold on to.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

You have blessed me and my family, even with all our messiness. You made me. And you love me, just as I am. And because I am confident in that, I can make it through another day of messiness, even if the dishes don't get done before bed.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

I am yours, and You are mind. Forever. It's a promise. Pinky swear.

So today, as we celebrate families, and mothering figures in our lives, we have this wonderful opportunity to remember that God's family, since the beginning of time has been messy. God knows it because He created us. He designed us to be messy. It's how we learn and grow. It's how we spread His love around the world.

And I think God loves messy churches too. Sometimes I even giggle to myself when I think how marvelous it would be if people drove by our church and 'tsk-tsk'd' us as they drove by, "That church family!"

We're getting a new sign out front soon. Maybe we should add the banner:

*Messy families wanted!
All shapes and sizes.
You are welcome here!*