

SERMON

Matthew 12:46-50

Living as a Single

Nunawading and Waverley, 22-5-22

Dear friends in Christ,

I had an interesting experience on Friday. Father Patrick Jackson from St. Christopher's on Blackburn Road requested that I participate in a funeral for a Lutheran lady whose surviving husband was a Catholic. He invited me to read a lesson, speak for a minute or two, begin and end the prayers and, wait for it, distribute communion. I was blown away. Father Pat is an elderly man, single and dedicated to Christ. I was intrigued about his life and how he used his days, especially as an unmarried priest.

We often think that the central thing about the church is the family. Obviously, the members of Christ come from couples and families. Families, are indeed the cornerstone of society but they are not in the church. This may seem very strange to our ears.

Singles comprise the young, widows and widowers, those living alone and those who do not have a marriage partner, the divorced and single parents. What calling from the Lord do they have? Many people may look at singles, the older ones I mean, and feel sorry, thinking how sad that they will not have children. A single Christian wrote:

Of course, you can be preoccupied for a good deal of the time with your work, and find it really does take your mind off yourself. Even so you can hardly help but have some leisure; and what is to fill that? Well, a whole heap of interests, to keep your time and your hands and your thoughts busy, yes, and your emotions too. But what then? You come home to yourself again: the embers are cold in the grate, and the house is empty.

What if we took Jesus' definition of family and really lived it?

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. 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.”

Jesus was being really radical. What he was saying was that marriage and family are only temporary structures; they are not going to be the lasting arrangements of his eternal kingdom. When we come to him in faith and accept him as our Saviour, then he places us into a new corporate arrangement, namely, his body the church. The Spirit unites us to Christ and joins us to each other through his body. That is the action that takes place in our baptism. Mum, dad and 2.4 children are not the norm at all.

The challenge for us all is to make the church one huge, inter-generational family. Of course, the young singles want to be amongst Christian peers and some will find a life-partner there. Most of the time, the church is all ages and all states of coupling and singles. Church, then, is a glimpse of how things are going to be. The person I quoted before said that he had 12 god-children, meets regularly with a Christian family, is involved in a small group and catches up with another family for coffee after church.

A peculiar thing is happening in our country. Parents are hugely busy, stretching themselves to cope with two jobs, child-care arrangements, after-school sport and cultural commitments, excursions, illness etc etc. I look at my next-door neighbours who have two primary school boys and notice that no one visits except family. I think about this a lot. Maybe family life creates a different sort of loneliness. Anyway, I could be completely wrong but wouldn't it be interesting if singles invited busy couples into their sanctuary and gave them time away from children. Maybe church is the antidote for our Australian culture, after all! We can become a church family that is able to cross ordinary family boundaries and reach anyone, whether single or not.

Jesus was single. The apostle Paul was single. The two greatest people in the New Testament were singles. In fact, Paul advocated singleness as a special calling in 1Corinthians 7. Jesus got their first saying that some very special people will remain single in order to be evangelists and servants of God in his kingdom, like Father Pat. Maybe, we have to give a special status and honour to singles. Whatever, when church feels like family for anyone entering our doors, then we must be doing something right.

You are going to a movie. A picnic is being held. The outback beckons you on an adventure. A cafe just opened in your shopping centre. Whom are you going to invite from your church?