

WGUMC October 12, 2014 "Adam's Family: The Remake"
I John 3:11-18

After creating heaven and earth, God created Adam and Eve. And the first thing God said was, "Don't."

"Don't what?" Adam replied.

"Don't eat the forbidden fruit," God said.

"Forbidden fruit? We got forbidden fruit? Hey, Eve...we got forbidden fruit!"

"Don't eat that fruit!" said God.

"Why?" said Adam.

"Because I am your Father and I said so!" said God (wondering why he hadn't stopped after making the elephants).

A few minutes later God saw his kids taking an apple break and got angry. "Didn't I tell you not to eat the fruit?" God asked.

"Uh huh, " Adam replied.

"Then why did you do it?"

"I dunno," Eve answered.

"She started it!" Adam said.

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"DID NOT!"

Having had it with the two of them, God's punishment was that Adam and Eve should have children of their own. And that's how we got where we are today.

I wanted to talk about healthy relationships, but I'm not sure we know what that means. Because if you've ever read the book of Genesis, you know that human relationships have been messed up from the very beginning. Adam and Eve get

kicked out of the Garden of Eden. Their firstborn son murders their second one.

After Cain settles in the land of Nod, east of Eden, my Bible contains the heading, "Beginnings of Civilization." But it turns out that civilization isn't very civilized, and in Chapter 4 we meet Lamech: "I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me." [Gen 4:23]

Things pretty much degenerate from there until we get to Chapter 6, where "The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." [Gen 6:5-6]

At that point, another Lamech fathers Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief..." [Gen 5:28-9] And God looks at Noah, "a righteous man, blameless in his generation," and God gets an idea: let's

do a remake. [Gen 6:9] After all, Adam's family had gone rogue and it was time for a recall.

Do you ever look at your family of origin or your in-laws and have similar thoughts? Are you ever tempted to build yourself an ark, call down the wrath of God and sweep all those relations away? The problem with that approach is that it doesn't really solve the problem, does it? Noah and his family survived the flood only to start the cycle of sin all over again.

Something needs to change, and it isn't crazy Aunt Lucy. Besides, we aren't God. We can't change other people. We can only change ourselves. Gandhi said it: "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." So if we want our relationships with our spouse or our children or our neighbors or coworkers to change, we have to change. But we are even more embedded in relationships than that. If we want our communities, our culture, our Congress, or any other part of the cosmos to be different, we have to make the difference.

The Flood in Genesis didn't make the difference for us, but God has never stopped trying to remake us. In the Book of Jeremiah, God is at it again: "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant...that they broke...But this is the covenant I will make...I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

[Jeremiah 31:31-33]

Even the prophets knew that change comes from within. It must first be written on the heart before it can ride the wind. If we want healthy relationships in our lives, we need to start here, in our hearts. OK. But how do we change our hearts?

We're going to need some help on this, so God sent us a new kind of man, a new Adam, to replace the old one. Paul writes, "'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit...The first man was from the

earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven...Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven." [I Corinthians 15:45-49]

Christ is the New Adam. Christ is Humanity, The Remake. And when we join his family, our hearts do change. And as our hearts change, our relationships change. And as our relationships change, then by definition, our world will change.

Baptism is one way to join the family, and once you're a member of the family of Christ, there is only one rule of life: "love one another." For every relationship we are in, love is the answer. But apparently, we keep forgetting the question, because you'll find the commandment to love repeated over 30 times in the New Testament. It shows up again in our reading for this morning.

Here's Cain, the son of poor old Adam. As you know, Cain did not love his brother. He murdered him. Likewise, all who hate their brother or sister murder something—inside

themselves. But those of us who are in Christ, "have passed from death to life because we love one another." [1 John 3:14] And lest you think that this is some Hallmark card I'm selling you, let me remind you that we love "not [only] in word or speech, but in truth and action." [3:18]

I know, it's easy to talk about love in the abstract. It's much harder to imagine what love should look like in the flesh, in any particular human relationship. And I can't tell you what love looks like in your marriage, in your family, in your workplace. But I can show you what love looks like in the Church. At least I hope so, for if we can't learn to love one another here, we won't learn anywhere. Think of it this way: if Christ is the New Adam and we in the Church are his sisters and brothers by faith, then the Church is Adam's family remade. And the proof of that is that we love one another.

First, we love one another by praying for each other. And in this church our prayers are so real we can see and touch

them. Our prayer shawl ministry is growing all the time. I don't know how our knitters manage to keep up. Talk about being the hands of Christ! So we're giving them a hand by donating some yarn today.

Next, we love one another by caring for each other. Today we launch the Willow Glen UMC Care Team. When I arrived, Ruby Goodnight and Grace Praisewater were doing so much of the caregiving around here. And when they got to the point that they needed care, we had to start thinking about how we would organize that.

Reinhold Niebuhr once said that the church is God's love organized. And so a group of us got together and talked it over and over and over, and starting today, we are trying out a new system. I hope you've read your brochure by now and are ready to sign up to be "on call" to care because that's what church members do. And if you have any questions, just stop by the Care Team table after worship today.

So we love one another by praying and caring for one another. But we also love by advocating for each other. Once we let Christ change our hearts, we can't help but want to change the world.

I was in the office on Wednesday afternoon. I was hoping to leave a little early so I could read my lesson for Bible study. Just then Rosemary from the Preschool told me that there was a woman waiting on the back step for me. I went out to talk with her, sat down, and listened to a long litany of reasons why our world needs to change. The woman was disabled. She obviously had poor mental and physical health. Her legs and feet were swollen to the size of small tree trunks. She was in pain and crying and worried that her skin would break. I asked her if she needed to go to the emergency room. She said that she'd been to the doctor, and he had ordered bed rest so that the swelling could go down.

The only problem was that she and her boyfriend were

sleeping in the cab of a pickup truck. She couldn't stretch out or elevate her legs. So, could I get her a few nights in a motel? The cheapest place we could find for her and her boyfriend and two dogs was a Motel 6 in Watsonville, so I arranged to send her there. Then she asked me if I knew of a room she could rent. I told her if I knew of an affordable room to rent, I'd already have a half dozen people lined up to take it.

By the time I got to Bible study that evening without having read my lesson, I was all agitated because I'm sick and tired of not having any answers for people who come to me week after week, who are day laborers or low wage workers or on disability and can't get any housing around here. I know a lot of you are sick and tired, too, but do we love Jesus enough to do something about it?

Our Building Hope Committee, in conjunction with Sacred Heart, is hosting an affordable housing forum this afternoon in the fellowship hall. Our own Pat Farrow and Jolene Jones did a

lot of work to put this together, and I think Jesus would be pleased. Even if the Son of Man "has nowhere to lay his head," that doesn't mean that he thinks it's OK for our neighbors to be homeless, too. [Matthew 8:20]

My friends, I'm proud of this Church because we love one another, not just in word and speech but in truth and action. We pray, we care and we advocate for one another. And what we are doing here is what love looks like. It's not easy, it's not pretty, but it is family. All I have to say is: don't worry too much about the family you were born into, because your church is the family you can be reborn into. Welcome to the New Adam's family.