

Family Feud

1 John 3: 1-2

We are all children of God, but what does that mean for how we live together? What do we do when conflict divides us? What about all our brothers and sisters of different faiths and beliefs? What about other Christians who are exclusive or fundamentalist? How do we relate to these as family even when we don't necessarily like them – certainly when we are in conflict with them?

This marks the beginning of a new sermon series with the title *How Do You Spell Love? I'll* look in some depth at the centrality of love to the way of following Jesus. This way goes through family feuds, church conflicts, religious rifts, and more. It is a process of figuring out how to accomplish those most challenging of New Testament commandments: “be angry, but don't sin” (Ephesians 4: 26) and “love your enemies.” (Matthew 5: 44) It's not that we can have enemies. We just have to love them. We have to learn how to deal with our differences in love.

We celebrate today the tenth anniversary of Bob Rockford as Children's and Youth Pastor at Crossroads Church. Just a couple of months ago, we celebrated the tenth anniversary of Crossroads as a congregation. This means that the founders of Crossroads Church took only two months before calling and hiring a pastor to work with their youth and children. Rocky is a symbol of Crossroads' vision and strong commitment to youth and children as well as a recognition of the significant gifts for ministry possessed by him.

Bob Rockford is here, however, because of a family feud. In fact, Crossroads is here as church because of a family feud. It was a split in a church family that led to the formation of the congregation that would become Crossroads Church. Despite that split and despite the feud, we remain one family with our former congregation. As the as writer of the Epistle of 1 John said, “Beloved, we are [all] God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed.” (1 John 3:1) We are all God's children, all works in progress. Come to think of it, I, too, am here because of a family feud. This was not just the feud that brought Crossroads into existence.

Last weekend, I was not here. I was representing you by attending a gathering of our extended church family in Charlotte, North Carolina. Twenty-five to thirty years ago there was a family feud in the family called Southern Baptists. That feud led to the formation of the Southern Baptist Alliance, a small network of congregations and individuals with a strong commitment to religious freedom and the separation of church and state. That network became the Alliance of Baptists. That organization became a leader in advocating the role of women in pastor leadership; the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender persons in the church; active ministry in Cuba; and especially the separation of church and state. They continue to stand for a *free church in a free state*. The Alliance also helped a minister in Washington, DC find a church in Kansas City.

The Alliance of Baptists met in Charlotte last weekend to conduct business together, affirm family ties, and inspire and be inspired by each other. Crossroads has so much in common with other Alliance congregations. They are our close family in faith. One of the very few differences I noticed was very interesting. In North Carolina, they tended to put the emphasis on the Baptist part – Alliance of **Baptists**. Most everywhere else, including here, the emphasis is on

Alliance – The **Alliance** of Baptists. At Crossroads, we see the family connection as an Alliance of freedom loving followers of Jesus who are passionately inclusive.

For your information, the Alliance had a very good meeting. There is exciting new leadership in place, very competent and creative people, and a new commitment to make better use of all the resources of the Alliance – its people and churches. In Charlotte, reports were shared in support of economic justice, climate change, and a very interesting “Statement on the separation of church and state as it relates to sanctioning of marriages in the US.” This last one was really two resolutions in one. In fact, that was the problem that led to its being referred rather than adopted. It seeks to encourage same-sex marriage and also encouraging the clergy to take seriously the separation of church and state by no longer signing marriage licenses. They would just do the religious ceremony and let a justice of the peace sign the legal document as a agent of the state. That’s actually something I’ve been thinking about myself. What was great was how everybody supported same-sex marriage and agreed on the importance of keeping state and church separate.

There is no feud among that portion of the family called the Alliance of Baptists, but many families do feud. The writer of 1 John reassured a small family of Christians living in a time of great uncertainty and concern: “Look at what love the Father has bestowed on us in enabling us to be called God’s children. Yes, beloved, we are God’s children right now.” Let us keep the truth always in front of us that God has made us one family, one with all others who call themselves by the name of Christ, one with all people who follow other paths and religious traditions -- one with all people and all creation.

The reality is that this oneness is not a free pass to avoid conflict and pretend that all relationship is easy. For ten years, Crossroads Church has stood up for freedom and spoken out for inclusion. It is appropriate for us to be in conflict with other people, other Christians, who reject people because of their sexual orientation, who blur the separation of church and state, and who limit people’s freedom to walk the journey of faith with integrity.

That is why we are here and why the Alliance of Baptists exists. That is why Bob and Jack and each of you are here at Crossroads. We will get angry when anger is called for – in the face of injustice. We will recognize that we are enemies of those who will not make peace and will not invite all people into the circle of God’s family. We will acknowledge that they are our enemies and will find ways to love them because “we are ALL children of God; we know that when God is revealed, we will All be like him.” So, even the face of our enemy reveals the face of God.

Let our life’s credo be found in these words:

May the God who dances in creation
Who embraces us with human love,
Who shakes our lives like thunder
Bless us and drive us out with power
To fill the world with her justice.”

(Janet Morley, *All Desires Known*)