

October 21, 2019

Hebrews 2:9-18

Welcome home! Does this place feel like home to you? Or more importantly, do we feel like family for you? I know some of you are thinking inside: “Yes, I do feel at home here! Yes, I do feel part of the family here!” But I’m also pretty sure some of you are thinking: “Home? This doesn’t feel like home. I like it better over at I don’t feel like I’m part of the family here; I feel more like a stranger, out of place, here. Sometimes I wonder if I’m even wanted or missed here at all.” If that’s you, please forgive me, forgive us for the ways we have failed you.

I’d like us to talk about that soon, sooner rather than later. But right now, I’d like to talk about someone who hasn’t failed us as family. I’d like to talk about my brother, your brother, Jesus. When we talk about family, we like to talk them up, don’t we? Starting with the youngest, my sister’s a lawyer, brother #4 is a financial planner, brother #3 - you’ve seen his work - he prints Hallmark cards on a printing press the size of a semi trailer, brother #2 is a pastor and this last week he was bragging that the only time his boys’ soccer team loses is when his boys aren’t there. When I wrote that I realized that with my family I think first of what they do or have instead of who they are.

Let me tell you who our brother Jesus is. My brother Jesus, your brother Jesus, is God. He doesn’t just think of himself as God (many of us have brothers or sisters like that, who like to think of themselves as god, don’t we?) But in the chapter before our lesson, God himself calls Jesus his Son, his heir, the owner of all things. And not just his Son, God calls Jesus God. As God - go back to the beginning of time - he laid the foundations of the earth. Today, just by the power of his words, he holds, the world, the whole universe together. (I know it doesn’t always look that way, but don’t be too quick to judge.) His rule is forever and ever, and in the end he will have all the pieces where they belong in his perfect masterpiece; he will have all his family together for the great celebration we call heaven. So who is Jesus? He is the Commander in Chief over God’s angel armies. He is the CEO of all God’s enterprises. He is the power that holds everything together. And - get this - he calls himself your brother. Kind of mind-blowing, isn’t it?

The Lord of heaven and earth calls you his brothers and sisters!

He wouldn't have to. He knows our pasts, and our presents. He knows the ugly that goes in and out of our hearts, the ugly that stains our insides, the ugly in us that we try so desperately to hide. Yes, he knows how ungodly and unworthy of God we are. And he knows God's judgment - **“the soul that sins, it shall die.”** Knowing us and God's judgment, he could find reason to ghost us. You know how it works in some families - the one who doesn't live up to the family plan is ghosted, treated as a nobody; the family trouble-maker is ghosted; the family mess is ghosted and ignored. Knowing us and God's judgment, Jesus could find reason to ghost us - to ghost us as the family trouble-maker, to ghost us as the family mess. He could find reason to ghost us and leave us damned as ungodly and unworthy of God. But instead of ghosting us, he left heaven to come down into our ugly, into our trouble-making, into our mess.

Why? Not to slum with us, but “to bring us to glory.” Not just to be our big brother counselor and counsel us out of our messes. Not just to be our life-coach and re-direct us out of our trouble-making. Not just to be our self-help guru and show us the way to a better life - “here's what you need to do...” No, Jesus came to do something more, to be something more. Jesus came to be our Savior - to bring us up out from our messes, out from our trouble-making, to bring us to glory, the glory of life right with God.

How? The Son of God became one of us. God himself became one of us “to taste death for us,” to break the power of death for us. By saying “he tasted death,” I'm not saying that Jesus took a little sip of death. No, Jesus had the big gulp of death. He didn't just pass away peacefully in his sleep. He didn't just go from happy, healthy, celebrating life one moment to sudden death the next. No, Jesus suffered death. He heard the crowds and felt their hatred: “Crucify him.” He felt his back being torn apart by the Roman soldiers whipping him, scourging him. He felt the thorns crushed into his skull, his blood streaming down his face. He felt the nails pounded into his hands and feet. And hanging on the cross, he felt the struggle to catch a gasp of breath. But that wasn't the worst of it. For Jesus, death wasn't just a function of body and brain. For Jesus, death wasn't just the worst of this

world out to destroy him. No, for Jesus, death was God's curse and judgment on the evil of this world. You know how angry we can get when people mess with us, how angry we can get at the evil, the injustice, the abuse we see. As angry as we get, God's anger at sin is whole lot hotter, as hot as hell. Jesus came from heaven to face God's anger for us - to take your guilt and mine, to die the death we owed God. And that is what Jesus did! He died for us; he tasted death. He died our death for us, and then he rose again, right - at one - with God. And by his death, Jesus paid the price to set you, me, the world - at one - right with God. What does that get to mean for us? Now, with Jesus, we don't need to be afraid of God. With Jesus, we don't need to be afraid of death or the devil or anything else in this world. With Jesus, we get to live in the glory of God; we get to live life with God in the family of God!

We get to live life in the glory of God. I know life, even life with God, isn't all glorious here in this world. I know life isn't all glorious here at St. John. But whether we see it or feel it or not, Jesus has brought us to his glory. Today the Lord of the universe calls you his brothers, his sisters, his family. And here, the Lord of the universe gathers you as his brothers and sisters to hear him proclaim the praises of God.

What do we do with that? The saints and angels in heaven get together to cheer Jesus; they get together to hear Jesus. Here on earth, we sometimes struggle with that. We all have our different personalities, some stepping up and in, some stepping back and away waiting for someone else to bring us in. Here we all have our hurts, some feeling stepped on, some feeling ignored, some Here we all have our stuff, don't we? And that makes it real easy to point and blame, to make excuses, to be too busy.

When you hear those voices, remember Jesus. He didn't point and blame, he didn't make excuses, he didn't make himself too busy. Instead, he made time for you, he took the blame for you, he forgives you. He didn't cocoon in his comfort zone; he didn't see us and shrug: "They're not my kind of people"; he didn't leave us behind or walk out on us. Instead, he stepped in to bring us together; he stepped in and made himself our brother; he stepped in and says: "Welcome home! Welcome home to the family of God!"

It's good to have a brother like Jesus, isn't it? And it's good to be brothers and sisters like Jesus - stepping in, stepping up, coming together as the family of God! May God bless us to be that kind of family! Amen.