

## Notes on Ephesians 2: 19 - 22 'Looking ahead – Looking to be like Family'

I wonder how many of us would agree with the sentiment that Christmas is just for children? All I know is that yes, I did love Christmas when I was a child, but I so wanted to join in all the fun of being an adult too. When we had children, Christmas once again changed, as it did when they all became adults, and it has continued to change now that they themselves have children. Like Christmas, the metaphor of the church being like a family is one which connects with all of us in a huge and powerful way in our hearts, minds and souls which is why I love it so and why I yearn for us to live in such a way and how it is such a strong motivator for good in and among us.

We are very blessed with our current leadership team and at our last Leadership meeting I asked them all to share their heart for us as a church. What they shared was things such as: Unity and Spiritual growth; Unity and multigenerational; Kingdom focussed on righteousness, joy and peace; Inclusive; Caring Family; Hospitality and sharing during the week; Belonging and bringing; A practical living out of God's truth in the world; Being like Jesus; Walking hand in hand; Loving, caring, encouraging and strong leadership; and Caring for all needs. The word which they all wanted to use but couldn't, as it would become very repetitive, was the word family. As I have reflected and prayed about this it makes sense for this metaphor as family is to be our strategic focus for us as a church for this year. When we think about what it means to live as the Family of God, we must avoid thinking of this in a romanticised or fantasised fashion. What I mean by this is that it is easy to fantasise about what perfection might look like and when it doesn't happen, we become angry and cynical about the church failing to be a 'proper family'. Rather what we should aspire to is the highest standards but recognise that we are people who fail and let each other down and as we accept our limitations and mistakes, we also seek not to be defined by them either.

This is why the picture of the church being the Family of God matter so much to Paul and how he understands what God's new creation brought in by Jesus' death and resurrection looks like. When we think of the Family of God, we remind ourselves that this is something which God has brought into being by our being adopted as the children of God. Thus, it is not built on either ethnic or any other common ground but on faith, and faith alone. Therefore, because we all share a common adoption by God, so it is in our shared family life that we see and meet God. In the parable of the Prodigal Son which son is it do you think was lost? The answer is both of them for the focus of the Father is his desire to have a whole family. The parable reminds us that we are to live out being the Family of God amidst the rough and tumble of normal family life, where you will find love and laughter, unity and arguments and falling out and failure. But it is in the midst of all this do we discover love truly does cover a multitude of sins, as Jesus commands in John 13 verses 34 and 35 (where our loving of each other is the one and only demonstration that we belong to Jesus) and in Matthew 18 verse 21 – 35 and the centrality and necessity of forgiveness.

When we think of what it means for us to live as the Family of God, we are reminded of the priority of the provision of pastoral care and the importance of the question 'Who do you care for?' Of asking to whom do you turn to in times of difficulty or who will turn to you when their life is filled with griefs and sorrows? We recognise the

importance of friendship circles and the heart of 'Doing Life Together' where we know it is not good for any of us to be alone and that all of us need friendship circles to help us to grow in being more like Jesus. Yet, at the same time we recognise that these friendship circles also have limitations, and this is where my role as Pastor and also Zania and the skills and experience we bring, as well as the Pastoral Team, matter in providing help at such times.

But as we read these verses that describe us as the Family of God, we are not to think of the church as only being like a family because it is so much more than this. When we think of ourselves as the Family of God, we remind ourselves these verses also speak of us as being like a Temple. That is when we think of ourselves as the Family of God, we are to realise we are also a place where God chooses to dwell, and he chooses to dwell in the people who sit near you and in the relationships which exist between you. To be part of the Family of God is to be not only amazed but to be also strengthened and encouraged by this companionship we know here so that we may all be empowered to fulfil our vocation as the People of God.

I love to use, to listen to and to learn from the phrase 'A Multi-Generational Church' for this is who we are and we are so blessed in being this. But there is a snag, to be such a church is also deeply demanding as it's not easy to live this way. But isn't this what the dynamics of a healthy family look like? The Family of God is how and where we grow in the fruit of the Spirit. It is how we demonstrate the truth of Jesus to a watching world and why people may want to ask why we live this way and dare to explore this faith which shapes us so. May this be true for us here in this church.

#### Questions on Ephesians 2: 19 - 22 'Looking ahead – Looking to be like Family'

1. When I speak of the church as being the 'Family of God', what is your response? Is this something overwhelmingly positive or negative and can you say why?
2. What are the dangers and pitfalls of thinking of the church as the Family of God in a romanticised or in a fantasised way?
3. How are we brought into the Family of God and why is this so important?
4. What does the parable of the Prodigal Son teach us about being part of the Family of God and who is the focus of the parable?
5. What do John 13 verses 34 and 35 and Matthew 18 verses 21 – 35 say to us about being part of the family of God?
6. How does Pastoral Care and Doing Life Together fit into the picture of being the Family of God?
7. How does the picture of us being the Temple of God deepen and develop the picture of us being the family of God?