

"All In The Family"
by Grace Johnson, Lay Speaker
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Good morning, will you Pray with me: May the words from my mouth and meditations in all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen

You know Edith Bunker's friend Amelia said to her one day "Of all the people I know, you're practically the only one who has a happy marriage." Edith said "Really? Me and Archie.....Oh thank you" "What is your secret, Edith?" Amelia ask. "Oh I ain't got no secret. Archie and me still have our fights. Of course, we don't let them go on too long. Somebody always says I'm sorry. And Archie always says, 'It's okay Edith'"

Sorry, I just had to throw in a little Archie Bunker and Edith humor because Today we are all about family.

Here we are, the year is 2012 and we are a couple of weeks short of this year being half over! Yeah! how does that make you feel. Well I have another one for you!

There are many of us here today who have the ability for the first time ever, to see our names in a census. If you were born between January 1, 1930 and December 31, 1939 this was the first time you were counted in the census. It had been determined that 72 years was the high end of the life expectancy table and the census would only be released after that amount of time had passed. So this is the year, that census is released. I'm in there, my name is right there along with my 3 brothers and 2 sisters!

I got interested in my family history years ago while talking with my dear Aunt Jessie. I was partially named for her. I told her one time I would rather have been called Jessie Grace than Grace Mildred, but I've gotten over that.

She was in her 80's or 90's, and she was able to put to rest some of the old rumors about our family. The most famous of those old rumors was about my great-grandmother Zilpha Witham Jacobs. We all thought she was an Indian Princess. Wasn't true of course, one of Aunt Jessie's older sisters made up the story when she was just a girl and it really grew wings with the kids that came before us. I can just imagine my amazing Aunt Dora, who had a wonderful sense of humor, chuckling every time she heard one of the little kids retell the story she had made up so many years before when she was just a young girl. I think actually

Great Grandmother Zilpha and my Great Grandfather Hiram were divorced and the family were all very embarrassed back then. It was never spoken of.

Tracing my history back has truly been a journey of discovery for me. I learned we come from England by way of the Norman conquest in 1066. I learned that one branch of my family tree came to the new world on a ship called "Rose of Yarmouth" in 1637. Were they looking for religious freedom? Don't know for sure. But they were listed on the passenger roll as Puritan.

One of them later became President. The 14th in fact, Franklin Pierce from New Hampshire. He was kind of a flop as a President, had a really tragic life, and died of cirrhosis of the liver at 64, but we are from the same tree.

I learned that hysteria took the life of my 8th Great Grandfather George Jacobs, when he was hung in August 1692 during the Witch trials that took place in Salem Massachusetts. So I have roots that go deep, but not nearly as deep as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ's roots. How many of you had to read all of those begats in the Old King James Bible when you were a kid in Sunday School? Talk about making your eyes spin! Well Jesus' roots go back to the beginning of time, and we are part of God's family on earth. It was here long before we were and will be here long after we are gone. But, for a short time we are honored to be a part of this family.

John Wesley once said that the "New Testament knows of no 'unattached Christians.'" Jesus said again and again that we cannot come to Him alone. We come to him with the rest of God's children, we are called to be part of God's family." Our roots go deep and Knowing our roots is important!

I was reading an article the other day about our "rootless generation." in it, is mentioned in a book called "Amusing Ourselves to Death" by Neil Postman. It says that one of the main causes of this rootlessness is television. Entertainment has become a way of life and that television religion, has been transformed into just another form of personal amusement.

In an article he wrote 30 years ago, Gerald Priestland, a British writer talked about "The False Church of the Air" He was very happy at that time that BBC did not allow individuals to form radio or television "churches. He said "A real Father Murphy or Reverend Smith is worth a dozen plastic media messiahs. He may be ugly, short tempered and inclined to drink a bit, but he is flesh and blood - and he grapples with a flesh and blood community. Which is what the Church is all about. Remember, Jesus admonished us to "Love our

neighbor as our self." To care for and serve each other. Jesus did not tell us to love and care for only the pretty people! Sometimes you may have to give the "Kiss of Peace" to someone with bad breath or smelly clothes.... But in the "Church of the Air" we are safe at home and don't have to hang around with anyone we don't want to..... But remember nothing we do, however honorable, can be achieved alone."

Bill Moyers thinks television is producing a generation of "Agitated Amnesiacs" who know everything about the past 24 hours, but nothing of our real history.

Well the church, as the family of God, acts as an answer to the rootlessness, because it continually reminds us that we do have roots It gives us our history. We are a part of that family, the family of God, that goes back to the beginning of time, and that it will be here long after we are gone.

We are all part of the family! Because Jesus redefined what it means to be a family. A family is not so much defined by their bloodlines but by their love and respect for one another. My own family is a perfect example of that. Richard is a father by choice not chance. He chose to be a father to my children, a father they could look up to and be proud of and they are. Now unless you are from a Catholic, Eastern Orthodox or Armenian church background and believe in Mary's eternal virginity, you know that the Gospels say Jesus had four brothers, they are named James, Joseph, Judas and Simon, and two sisters, Hmmm! unnamed sisters.

So Jesus had a family!

In our scripture today we learn that Jesus' birth family was worried about him. Well, he was acting a little odd! He was doing strange things, preaching, teaching, meeting with crowds of people and healing illnesses. They were probably embarrassed to have a religious zealot in their family. I think I would have been concerned if I had been around then. I probably wouldn't have understood what on earth was going on either. His family certainly didn't, so they come to take him home, to keep him safe until he comes to his senses. He just was not doing what they thought he should do. He was sort of an embarrassment to them. It is hard to put Jesus in a box and say this is who he is. He just was not what people of his time expected. But one thing we do know. EVERYTHING HE DID, EVERY LESSON HE TAUGHT, EVERY INDIGNITY THAT HE SUFFERED, WAS DESIGNED TO BRING YOU AND ME HOME TO GOD----TO THE FAMILY.

Keep in mind he had been doing strange things since he was just a boy, when he stayed in Jerusalem in "His Father's House." Do you suppose Joseph's feelings were hurt when he said stuff like that? I often wonder about that sort of thing when I read my Bible.

But I digress! His family, today they would be called the biological family, was hearing rumors of what he was saying and doing. Behavior so different his family began to think he was losing his mind, that He was beside himself!

My mom used to say that "I'm just beside myself today!" I never knew what that meant until I started researching this sermon. Then I found out I was probably driving my poor mother crazy.

So they come to take him home for some forced rest and relaxation. Not understanding what he was doing, they were worried. You know, I think he had been moving away from the family for quite some time. He was not what they expected. His family was mortified by him. He said and did strange things. He gathered strange people around him, fishermen, tax collector's for heaven's sake, they were not exactly the crème d'la crème. Perhaps he was "beside himself" You see He was a very complex man, not the kind of person easily defined. Consider, in Luke 14:26 he has said "Whoever comes to me and does NOT hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple." That really sounds odd. But here, Jesus is not thinking about family values, he is speaking about what happens to loyalty when people are asked to put God first. Jesus loved his biological family but he loved something else more. For Jesus, family is not about genetics and who raised us. He teaches us that we are bound together by stronger cords to fellow Christians than blood relatives who are not saved, who do not put God first.

On this day, Someone comes to Jesus and say's to him "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." He looks around and says "Who are my mother and brothers?" In asking that question of brotherhood, Jesus was inviting us toward a widespread bond, a category that is greater than gender or class or nation.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, "I can't for the life of me imagine God would say, 'I will punish you because you were born black, you should have been born white. I will punish you because you are a woman, you should have been born a man. I will punish you because you are a homosexual, you should have been born a heterosexual. I just do not believe that is how GOD sees things, because we are all part of God's family.'" Thank you Archbishop Tutu.

Gal. 3:28 says "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"

I'm not going to rewrite Paul's epistle to the Galatians, but perhaps it should read "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither male nor female, neither black nor white, neither homosexual or heterosexual, for you are all one in Christ Jesus!"

We are all part of God's Family. Loved and cherished by him regardless. Remember he said "For anyone who obeys the will of my Father, that person is my brother and sister and mother." He did not say "For anyone who obeys the will of my Father, and looks exactly like me, dresses exactly like me, eats, drinks and loves exactly like me, that person is my brother and sister and mother. We're all God's children! We're all loved by him and we're all called to love one another as he loves us.

I wish the delegates at General Conference this year had kept that in mind when voting. We are all called to be God's children.

While I was surfing the net looking for "Christian Humor" I came across a book called "And God Created Humor" by Conrad Hyers. On page 57, I found just what I was looking for. Pastor Hyers says that in the London Times Magazine he found a review of a book which proposed "Jesus' family were wealthy people, The disciples were rich and/or influential...none were the "simple fishermen"; Mary was not a simple, innocent, unaware small town Jewish girl-- she was in fact used to rubbing shoulders with the wealthy, attending parties, singing, dancing and drinking wine; Oh yes, and It gets better.... A member of the British Royal Family was the first Bishop of Rome; and Jesus was of English descent his Grandmother came from Cornwall...and the grave of the Virgin Mary's uncle was found at Glastonbury. What's more the author claimed to be a member of Jesus' family." Reverend Hyers goes on to say "His claims have never been taken seriously."

But today dear friends I want you to consider..... that you and I are exactly that..... members of Jesus' family, In fact that is precisely what we are called to be "All in the family" with Jesus Christ.

Let the people say Amen!