



# SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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## Sermon for Sunday, June 25, 2017

*The Third Sunday after Pentecost*

FR. ALAN GIBSON

Jeremiah 20:7-13 | Psalm 69:8-11, 18-20 | Romans 6:1b-11 | Matthew 10:24-39

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus said, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." Don't you find it a bit odd that this Sunday's gospel shows up right after Father's Day, and smack in the middle of the season traditional for weddings? What were the lectionary people thinking?

I've done a lot of weddings over the years and in an average wedding season there's always a handful of mother/daughter, daughter-in-law/mother-in-law, father/son conflicts that get played out over one of the billion details that make up a wedding celebration. I could write a book! But we don't have time this morning to share such juicy stories.

One thing that I can share, is that I've never seen one of these family squabbles erupt over an individual's commitment to Christ. I've witnessed skirmishes over flowers, seating arrangements, the caterer's bill, the uncle who dependably drinks too much, wedding marches, bubbles vs. birdseed vs. rice. (There's always something more underneath these squabbles. It's just easier to fight about trivial things.) Never have I seen a family torn apart because one member has decided to follow Christ.

Forgiveness, repenting from hurtful behavior, loving your neighbor, patience, discerning God's will, sacrifice, eternity -- those are pretty important issues in life; and are worthy of serious attention. Yet they are rarely the stuff of family quarrels. Begging your pardon, Jesus, but families are more than capable of finding plenty of things to fight about of their own making. They don't need you to drive a sword between them. Most people are willing to go to battle with those closest to them over issues much more trivial and selfish than your call to discipleship.

Like all families, Jesus' family had its rocky moments, too. When the twelve-year-old Jesus went missing for three days, Joseph couldn't have been too thrilled to finally find his son, only to hear him refer to the Temple as his "father's house." Mary and her other children surely didn't swell with familial pride when Jesus called the outcasts and downtrodden char-

acters he hung around with, his mother and brothers and sisters. And on the one occasion that his mother asked him for a favor, to turn some water into wine -- at a wedding -- Jesus must have felt so misunderstood. 'A magical bartender? Is that all she sees in me?' And those are just the tense moments that made it into the Bible. It makes one wonder what other, more juicy stories have been discreetly omitted.

It's not such a stretch to hear Jesus say that these familial relationships, some of the most intimate we will ever know, have to take second place to our relationship with him, if we want to be his disciple. Yet Jesus isn't telling us to turn our backs on our families. He certainly didn't. He couldn't. They were his family, no more, or less functional than our own. One of the last things Jesus did before he died was to be sure that someone would look after his mother. The fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," is not a suggestion, but an essential element in creating a decent life. Family relationships are the strongest human ties that exist. Even feuding families, or families that don't speak to each other, spend a lot of energy and emotion on this basic relationship. There's no escaping it.

What Jesus wants to know is how much of ourselves are we willing to spend on him, from whom we can choose to turn away. A life committed to Christ will have its rough moments, its disappointments, and what will seem like insurmountable obstacles. Jesus wants to know if we will stick with him when things get tough, when we're hurt or feeling betrayed; because in every relationship those times will come. How we face them is the truest test of the greatest commitment we will ever make.

In asking for our love and loyalty, Jesus isn't trying to hoard our affection. He asks for our love in order to give it back to us, so that we can love in God's name. Jesus lived to heal, forgive, comfort, encourage and give his life for us so that we might live forever in God's love, which knows no limits. To love God above all others, even a parent, or a child, or a spouse, in no way diminishes these relationships. To love God first, is ultimately to love those closest to us in ways we could never manage on our own.

So to those who were recently, or about to be, or have long

been married and the families these unions create: love your spouse, love your children, your parents, your siblings. Go ahead, it's even O.K. to love your in-laws. Just be sure to keep that love in front of you when the inevitable conflicts, both big and small, arise.

The best way to do that is to look for Christ in your spouse, your children, your parents, your siblings, and even your in-laws. And give them the opportunity to see Christ in you. It's not as big of a stretch as you might think. If Christ is allowed to be visible, then petty issues that once seemed worth going to war over might be seen for the trivialities they really are, and the important things can get the attention they deserve. And maybe, just maybe, fewer swords will be drawn.