

In God's Image

**Sermon notes for the sermon
given by Rev. Dr. Gregory Young
Presented on Sunday, February 20, 2011**

We all come into this life as part of a family and families come in all shapes and sizes. I was raised with the understanding that I was part of three family circles. First there was the family that cared for me, raised me and nurtured me on a daily basis – my mother, my father, and my older brother. These were the people who knew me best and saw me at my best and at my worst. These were the ones who, regardless of what I had done or failed to do, would always open the door and take me in.

The next family circle that I was part of is known by some as my extended family – my aunts and uncles, grandparents and great-grandparents, and my cousins. I remember seeing some of these on a less frequent basis. My paternal grandmother and her mother, my great-grandmother lived close by and we would see them on a weekly basis, usually on Sunday afternoons on our way home from church services. I was especially close to my great-grandmother and she, along with my mother, played a vital role in my faith development. It is a privilege for me to carry their bibles into this pulpit each time I preach. My father's brothers and their families we would visit maybe once a year. They lived farther away and there were deep wounds between my father and two of his brothers that impacted not only the frequency of our visits with them but also how we interacted with them. My mother's side of the family was in England so I only got to know them as a boy through pictures, letters and the stories my mother would share.

The third family circle that I was part of was my church family. One month after my birth I was presented by my parents for baptism and ever since I have been raised by the community of faith. Some of you may remember the difficulties and challenges I presented to this church family as you sought to love me and raise me in the kingdom of God. I will be eternally grateful for all three of these circles for imparting to me their values and their faith. Their stories have become my stories and the story of my life has been woven into the fabric of human civilization because of their patience with and trust of me.

All of us were raised in families. Some of us were raised by a single parent while others were raised by families that included not only extended blood relatives but also the members of the neighborhood and local community. Family imparts to us values and expectations that shape our lives and give us our view of the world around us helping to define what is good and safe and what is bad and dangerous. Think for a moment of how your life was shaped by the ones who you call and claim as family. What were some of the values that these people who are dear to you instilled in you? Remember how they helped you know what was good and what was considered bad. Ponder how your family defined danger and how they embraced safety. What were some of the lessons and tools that you family imparted to you that now shape and direct your life?

Take some time to hear from the congregation.

In the reading from Leviticus we hear this command from God spoken by Moses, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." The Gospel reading today ends with a similar command, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." In both cases God is speaking to us, to those who by virtue of baptism now find

themselves grafted into God's holy family. God's expectations for us, for all of us who now find ourselves in the family of the church are made clear through these commands – we are to be a holy and perfect people. I do not know about you but I find this a bit overwhelming and intimidating. How can I be holy like God is holy? I know who I am and God even knows me better and there are times when I know I am not living up to God's standards just like I knew when I wasn't living up to my parent's standards. I know for a fact and God knows it better that I am anything but perfect. When I would step out of line or not live up to my dad's expectations he did not waste any time letting me know. God sometimes lets me go a little while until my deck of cards comes crashing down and I once again find myself on my knees praying to the Almighty.

So, how do we become a holy people? How do we become perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect? Perhaps our families can help us to understand what God is inviting us to do. We did not learn to live in our families overnight. When we were born we had no idea who these others were who kept feeding us, changing our nappies, bathing us, encouraging us to speak and to walk, who kept picking us up when we fell down and cheering us on as we took one step after another. It is through the loving caring relationships of parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles neighbors, church members, That we began to take on the values and learned the boundaries of the family we were born into. So it is with God.

We are not born holy or perfect; however, through a life-long relationship with our heavenly father and with the people God is shaping into a holy family, we start to take on the identity of God's family. The teachings of the bible help us to learn how God's people live; what

they do and what they do not do; what we think and what we do not think; how we live in relationship with God and with one another and with outside of our family circle. It all begins with our baptism for it is here that we publically proclaim that this child is God's child and our child.