

"Family Values Practices"

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Mother's Day, Season of Eastertide, Sunday, May 10, 2015
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: John 15: 9-17 and Colossians 3: 12-17

John 15: 9-17

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you.

And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Colossians 3: 12-17

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in

all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

"Teach Your Children" by Graham Nash You, who are on the road must have a code that you can live by. And so become yourself because the past is just a good bye. Teach your children well, their father's hell did slowly go by, And feed them on your dreams, the one they fix, the one you'll know by. Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you would cry, So just look at them and sigh and know they love you.

And you, of the tender years can't know the fears that your elders grew by, And so please help them with your youth, they seek the truth before they can die. Teach your parents well, their children's hell will slowly go by, And feed them on your dreams, the one they fix, the one you'll know by. Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you would cry, So just look at them and sigh and know they love you.

Family Values are Meant to Be Practiced

Prediction:

This morning in church pulpits from Decatur to Detroit, from Augusta to Anaheim,

Christian preachers will testify to the virtues Toya Graham, and proclaim her the "Mother of the Year."

As seen by millions of people via YouTube and described by the Washington Post: [\[1\]](#)

"A woman seen berating and hitting a black-clad teenager, later confirmed to be her son, has been hailed as "mom of the year" after her intervention

on the streets of Baltimore was caught on video. As violence flared up across the city on Monday, the woman, who was identified as Toya Graham..., was filmed telling her child to "take that [explicative deleted] mask off."

Graham spoke to [CBS News](#) about the video, which initially went viral...

In the interview, the single mother of six tells the network that she intervened out of concern for her 16-year-old son's safety.

Toya Graham said, "That's my only son, and at the end of the day, I don't want him to be a Freddie Gray.

But to stand up there and vandalize police officers, that's not justice."

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Another American named Graham, singer songwriter Graham Nash, was moved by a photograph taken by Diane Arbus entitled Child with Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park, New York City (1962).

Graham Nash recognized a spiritual correlation between Diana Arbus' photo of a child playing with a violent toy

and Nash's own a personal prayer and hope that parents be mindful of what we teach

our children.

Nash wrote a song called "Teach Your Children"

that serves as a contemporary psalm for handing down of the code we live by,

a prayer for peaceful means and ends, as an affirmation that our dreams are to be shared with the next generation down as well as up.

Like Toya Graham, Graham Nash recognized that parents

have a social responsibility to show and model, to instruct and teach our children

what it means to be a part of the human condition.

Nash wrote these timeless words that resonate from Berkeley to Baltimore to Baghdad:

You, who are on the road must have a code that you can live by.
And so become yourself because the past is just a good bye.
Teach your children well,
 their father's hell did slowly go by,
And feed them on your dreams,
 the one they fix, the one you'll know by.
Don't you ever ask them why,
 if they told you, you would cry,
So just look at them and sigh
 and know they love you.

Family Values are Meant to Be Practiced

Love can be tough, and sometimes tough love is the surest way to teach your children.

When I was around 6 years old

 I showed my mother the half-eaten roll of root beer flavored
Lifesavers

 that I had taken from the supermarket checkout
counter

 while she paid for the groceries.

Since we were almost home and half of the Lifesavers were in my
tummy

 I figured I was in the clear. I figured wrong.

Despite the fact that we were hauling several bags of groceries
and it was a long, long walk back to the supermarket,

 she promptly turned around and marched my butt
all the way back,

 where she found the store manager

 and demanded I apologize for the
misdemeanor

 while she dug out a nickel
and penny

 to pay for the
candy.

The store manager accepted both my apology and her 6 cents.
All I saw was the tops of my shoes.
Mother never mentioned it again;
 she let it go and all was forgiven and forgotten.
Looking back now I can see that for her a teachable moment was
there for the plucking,
 and my mother grabbed it with gusto.
Even though I never again ate a root beer flavored Lifesaver,
 the real life savers were the life lessons about integrity,
 owning up to poor judgment and harmful behavior,
 and that it is never too late or too early
 to say you are sorry and receive
the gift of forgiveness.

Disciples of Jesus Christ have a deep appreciation of the gift of
forgiveness,
 knowing that our debt has been paid
 and we have been given a clean slate to start again,
and again, and again.

I imagine that you have similar stories of teachable moments and life
lessons
 that altered your behavior and the paths you chose.
Odds are high that we could sit around and share a story or two
 about how we learned the code we live
 thanks to the tough love and tender mercies
 of those who reared us with life saving
instruction.

Family values that have depth and breadth,
 that resonate with meaning and purpose,
 that share an ethical core and practical application
 all share one thing in common: love.

Alongside 1 Corinthians 13, Colossians 3: 12-17 is such a sweet
scripture,
 one that is timely, relevant, appropriate, covenantal , and
supremely gracious.

The Apostle Paul speaks of what is to be valued and embodied

in families, in church, in the wider community.
At the center of all that we do and hold dear and are called to become is love.

Listen for the Word of God as expressed by Paul:

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,
clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness,
and patience.

¹³ Bear with one another
and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other;
just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love,
which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Clothe yourself with compassion and kindness,
with humility and patience, with forgiveness and love.

Clothe yourself with love.

Be bound to everything and everyone in every land in perfect
harmony.

Sounds like a Coca-Cola jingle from the early 1970s,
yet in fact there is much truth here.

The love of Christ has already broken down the walls that divide
and the sin that separates and the darkness that stymies our
vision.

Love has already won the day.

All that is left is for us to live into our true calling to practice God's
family values.

We can do this; we can be this; our story can be transformed into
God's story.

Jesus said, "As the Creator has loved me, so I have loved you; abide
in my love.

I do not call you servants any longer,
because the servant does not know what the master
is doing;

but I have called you friends,
because I have made known to you everything
that I have heard from my Creator." John

15: 9, 15

One of the beautiful aspects of this teaching from Jesus
is that he instructs us that nothing comes between us and
God;

we have direct access to the love of God.
Just as God loved and abided in Jesus,
just as Jesus loved and abided in His Creator,
so too can we abide in this love.

Jesus loves you so much He passes on to you what God made known
to Him.

He said, "I call you friends"
and then passes on to His friends, His followers, His flock
His faith and teachings, gifts and love.

This is what people do who care about other people,
who are invested in who and whose they are.

We pass on what life savers we've learned,
and we pass on how to learn from each another.

Clearly Jesus Christ invests Himself in you and me,
otherwise He wouldn't care what we knew or did or acted or
believed.

Who else do you think is invested in your life?

Who else really cares about you?

Who has given you the time of day and timely advice,

a good shoulder to cry on and good counsel to lean on?

Family Values are Meant to Be Practiced

Last Sunday morning one of our elders, Yolanda Lewellyn,
prayed at the Communion Table for the Bread.

Yolanda Lewellyn said – and here I paraphrase:

"God, help us to love one another.

Remind us that we don't get to pick and choose
the individuals or groups that we love."

If the Church of Jesus Christ doesn't upset you and upset your

applecart

then maybe you are not paying attention.

Let those with ears to hear, hear.

The Good News is that the Gospel is and should be infuriating.

Jesus teaches his children that the greatest family value

is to love one another,

to love our enemies,

to love even those people and groups

whom we don't pick and choose to

love.

A friend shared a story about the time way back when his son was a rebellious teenager.

He wanted to give his boy a piece of his mind,

and was on the way to do so

when he bumped into a wise mother in his church.

She listened to him rant and rave as he got heated up for the confrontation.

Then she said, "I wonder what God is trying to teach you through your son."

Her wisdom and prayerful pondering

gave him reason to pause and reflect.

He prayed for God to show him a lesson he needed to learn,

rather than trying to teach his son a lesson.

Today my friend the father reflects and recognizes how much he and his son are alike.

He knows now that Jesus opened his mind to see

how sometimes the folks whom we perceive

to be the most difficult to deal with

might actually be very much just like us...

He admits today what he could not back then in the heat of the moment:

sometimes we react so strongly to particular people

because deep down inside we can see in them the

ugly side of our self,

the side we ignore and keep in the shadow

places.

I wonder if this is what keeps us from loving our enemies,

from loving those individuals and groups
whom we might not pick and choose to love.
I wonder if we fear that they might be more like us
than we care to admit or recognize or confess.
And what happens when we ask ourselves the wise mother's
question,
the woman who was clothed in love, who gently pondered,
"I wonder what God is trying to teach you through
your relationship."

Family Values are Meant to Be Practiced

One day when I was in high school I returned home with a great story to tell my mother.
She started to spread fresh sheets on a bed while I prattled on.
When I paused to take a breath she said,
"James, there are three kinds of men.
One will make the bed himself.
The second will make the bed with his spouse.
The third will watch while someone else makes the bed.
Which one do you want to be?" I got the hint and pitched in.

Family values like pitching in, working as a team,
not airing one's dirty laundry in the street or on social media,
have shaped us, hopefully for the better.

Some core values that have been instilled in this soul are:

- Have fun!
 - Pick your battles.
 - Hold doors open for other people.
 - Work with whomever God sends.
 - Pick up the tab for men and women in uniform.
 - In all circumstances, give thanks.
 - Don't let the sun set on your anger.
 - Don't pull up the drawbridge after you are across;
- in other words, look behind you and help those who get left behind or left out.
- Connect with a cause greater than yourself.

I share with couples in premarital counseling
that this is a core family value that will enhance their
marriage.
Connecting with a life-affirming cause that makes a world of
difference
makes you more interesting to be with,
while at the same time makes you feel better about
being alive.
Service above self is the incarnation of loving one another.
Of all the family values, when we get weary
this is the one we might be quickest to set aside and cease
to practice.

Nancy Brewer, my mother-in-law (mother-in-love in our family
tradition)

wrote the following poem she entitled "GENE POOL"
(October 2011):

I've done my share. I've paid my dues.
Volunteers needed? Well, I refuse.
Chair a committee? If truth be told,
I've chaired a-many, but I'm just too old.
Well, just take the minutes, an easy task.
No, I've had my turn, so please don't ask.
No more casseroles will I bake.
No more raffle tickets will I take.
The community garden is ready to plant.
When they call for help, I'll say "I can't."

I glance in the mirror and with shock I see
the face of my Mom, looking back at me.

Memories flood of how she slipped away,
With the ledger balanced for that fated day.
A bookkeeper, retired from that lifetime career,
She was some group's treasurer, year after year.
Cake in the freezer for a Fellowship meal,

With banana bread ready for a food appeal.
February birthday cards written in advance,
Tithe checks written, nothing left to chance.
She transported "older ladies," then a stroke
Was just a nuisance of which she rarely spoke.
In her ninth decade, she could no longer drive,
But caring for others kept my Mom alive.

I glance in the mirror, and I see through a blur
My mother's daughter, wishing it was her.

Her genes, her example, my habits? I'd guess
When they call for volunteers, I'll likely say "yes."

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

[1] Abby Ohlheiser, Washington Post, April 28, 2015: "Mom filmed berating her son at Baltimore riots didn't 'want him to be a Freddie Gray' "