

1. (oops!) Blood is thicker than water, right? That's a phrase that we use to underline the importance of families. Blood is thicker than water is something you might say to highlight how important it is to honor your parents' wishes, to move to a town closer to your sister, or to pass up a promotion so your family can stay put. Blood is thicker than water, right?

And we would say that's the case for the Church, also. Another church I drive past on the way to here has a sign that reads, "Family focused. Christ Centered." Wouldn't we say the same of Faith Lutheran?

2. (ugh!) Isn't the Church a family? Yet Jesus says a bunch of things that aren't family friendly in today's Gospel text. I think the problem is that we often treat Jesus like a crazy uncle. You know how it is with your crazy uncle. He says some outrageous things then you just wave it off and say, "Oh, you know, Uncle Tim, he says crazy things, but we all love him, right?"

But Jesus isn't your crazy uncle. He's your Savior. Let's re-read these words of Jesus and let them sink in. **"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. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."**

Isn't the Church a family? This doesn't seem very family focused. What do we say to the families gathered here and watching online? What do we say to the families who will be gathering here later this week for a family-only confirmation service? Jesus seems to be going against what the church stands for. Jesus seems to be anti-family rather than pro-family.

How many of us love our grandkids? How many of us miss family gatherings? How many of us are proud of our son or daughter, niece or nephew, or cousin who is getting confirmed this weekend? How many of us would gladly die for our loved ones to assure their safety?

Isn't the Church a family? Is it bad to love our parents? Is it bad to care for our kids? Is it bad to look forward to that next family reunion, or the next pizza night at uncle Tim's where he can gather us around and recount all his wild stories from his youth?

These things are certainly not a sin! We are called to honor our father and our mother, and the Bible tells us elsewhere to love and cherish our children. Yet Jesus reminds us, **"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."** Idols spring up when we make a good thing the best thing, and when we value the gifts Christ gives rather than Jesus Himself—even families.

The emphasis is on Jesus' words in verse 40, **"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."** Or to borrow

some verses from last week which also are referenced in the Confirmation rite itself, Matthew 10:32–33, “**So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.**” Family-focused and Christ centered? Rather, the focus of the Church family is to center on Christ.

3. (Aha!) Christ calls the Church through the washing of water with the Word. In the Church is blood thicker than water? Quite the contrary, IN THE CHURCH, WATER IS THICKER THAN BLOOD. To be a Christian means to be adopted into a new community. Baptism is the water that runs thicker than blood in the context of the Church, and it joins us together as brothers and sisters in Christ. Baptism means that God is *our* Heavenly Father, Christ is our brother, and the Church is our mother.

4. (whee!) Through the Church, we are called to something greater than family. Is the Church a family? Yes, but it’s something greater than family. Being part of the Church means that you have been tied to Jesus. And yes, sometimes that means sharing in His sufferings. Your association with Jesus may harm relationships with mother, father, sister, brother, or other relatives. In fact, in some parts of the world to become a Jesus-follower means your parents and siblings will disown you. This is all part of the cross that Jesus calls us to carry.

Being part of the Church means that you have been tied to Jesus, and yes there are sufferings, but think of how much greater are the blessings, comforts, and peace that this Prince of Peace brings.

Because Jesus Christ took up His cross, your sins are forgiven. Even as He was rejected by men, you will always find acceptance with Him. Even as He was written off as crazy by his family, He will always love you. Even as He died criminal’s death, you will never be alone, even if you are lonely, anxious, and worried. Because He lost His life for us, death no longer has dominion over us. We need not fear sickness, suffering, or death. Christ has overcome death and brought us eternal life.

Because Jesus Christ suffered, died, and rose again for you, God is no longer angry at you. But rather, in baptism, God becomes your heavenly Father who loves you completely, who has a plan for you, and who will give you your daily needs. He is in control of the heavens and the earth, and He is in control even of this pandemic that we’re facing with the uptick of cases.

And He places us into a new community, namely, the Church. That certainly might include your biological brothers and sisters, mother and father, but one that also adds surrogate brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, and grandmas and grandpas.

We as the Church are to act as a family, but not one joined together by a man joining a woman in marriage, or a mother giving birth to a child, but rather as those who share a common Father, God our Heavenly Father, who cherish a common brother, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit gathers us by the washing of water with the word to make us into something stronger and closer than a biological family.

5. (yeah!) In this new community, we can acknowledge Jesus at all costs. **“So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”** And so we have it that we’re gathered here on a confirmation Sunday with family here and yet more family and friends watching from online.

This is a great day in the Church. The confirmands will affirm the gifts that Jesus Christ has given them in their baptism, and to confess that water is indeed thicker than blood in the Church. The questions that were asked of their sponsors at baptism will be asked of them directly, and they will confirm the faith that has been growing in them from that day they were baptized. They will be welcomed into a new level of fellowship in the Church, communicant fellowship wherein they can receive Christ’s body and blood for forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The power of promises that we make to God lie not in our ability to keep them, but in our Heavenly Father’s ability to keep them in us. Often confirmation services remind us of our confirmation and how little we understood the oaths we were making back then. But it is my prayer for each of these confirmands even as it is my prayer for everyone hearing this sermon, that the Holy Spirit is working in you on a daily basis through His Word and Sacrament to confirm and strengthen those promises we made.

As Christians knowing the love of our Heavenly Father, the forgiveness and eternal life in Christ, and the support of our Church we can confidently say that for us as Christians joined together with Water and the Word, there are things worse than death, even though we are not to actively seek out death. There are things worse than being shamed, disowned, and rejected by our biological families, even though we are not to actively seek out being alienated by our families. There are things worse than Coronavirus, even though we are to engage in best practices of minimizing its spread.

For Christians there is nothing worse than denying Christ. To put it another way, for Christians there is nothing better than believing in Jesus. In Him, we have forgiveness, eternal life, and peace and nobody can take that away from us. May we by the power of the Holy Spirit confess Jesus Christ as our Lord every day of our lives. Amen.