

**Sermon:** Proper 7A

**Title:** Harry Potter and the Fractured Family

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As some of you know, the Harry Potter books are some of my favorites of all time. I find in them a great deal of wisdom, some concepts that challenge me, and fun. Always fun.\*

Harry James Potter is orphaned as an infant and placed with his Aunt and Uncle who actively dislike him and consistently neglect him. At the beginning of the series, he sleeps in a cupboard under the stairs and never gets new clothes or presents.

At 11, Harry is sent to Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry where he will be surrounded by other magical children, like himself. There he will be sorted into a “house,” or subset of the community, who shares certain character traits with him, like a family.

He forms a posse consisting of people from his own house and others who will be his friends for the duration of the series, like siblings.

He is a favorite of the headmaster and is taken under his wing. Professor Dumbledore becomes a grandfatherly character for Harry.

He is mothered by his head of house, Professor McGonagall.

He has a nutty uncle in Hagrid.

A warm and wonderful home experience with the Weaselys.

A kind and wise mentor in Professor Lupin.

And even a mysterious and dangerous godfather, his only conventional family.

My point here is that on the surface of it, Harry Potter has no family in the traditional sense. And yet all the roles of family, all the support and guidance, affinity and, yes, love, that we associate with family are seen in Harry’s community. That which we have come to call Harry’s “found family.”

In our text this morning, Jesus takes on the false idol of the traditional, conventional family.

*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 one's foes will be members of one's 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*

Jesus is saying, you must be a Christian before you are a Craig or a Robertson or a Jones. You must be faithful to the principles I teach you, even if it means angering your father and mother, or imperiling your family relationships. "Stand with God's truth, regardless of who it offends." Because it will offend. (It is almost like Jesus was predicting Facebook.)

The people to whom Matthew is speaking today would have heard a very dismal message from this text. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, families were everything. Your family was your home. Huge extended families lived, if not together, then in close proximity to one another.

Your family was your 401K. When one became unable to work, the rest of the family was duty-bound to maintain that person.

Your family was your identity. Look how much time Matthew spends at the beginning of this gospel enumerating Jesus' family, as a means of establishing his credibility.

Everything in your life was bound up in your family and so for Jesus to propose that his disciples owed greater allegiance to him than to the family was a challenge.

But what Jesus was proposing was not the destruction of family, but the removal of family as an idol. He does not propose the end of loving and supportive relationships but rather the placement of these relationships in the wider lens of the Kingdom.

The love that Jesus brings to his followers, the love of God, is wide and deep, ceaseless and durable, in a way that earthly love cannot comprehend.

Jesus invites us in this text to look past our concept of family love, a very limited and earthly construct, to see the greater and wider view of the love of the Kingdom.

And just as it shocked the 1<sup>st</sup> Century audience, this challenge to family tests us today.

We place the idea of family on a pedestal. We place huge weight on what we call "family values." We esteem "a family owned and operated business." We have all absorbed the questionable truth that a great deal of the world's troubles could be resolved if we all just sat down to dinner *as a family* every night. Divorce still carries a stigma, even if it ends abuse or brings about greater happiness. Adoption is a truth we tell our children "when they are ready," as if it were unnatural.

And if that Normal Rockwell image of the family, as being two heterosexual persons with 1.5 children and a yellow lab, is not what your family looks like, if you have one parent, or no parents, if your parents are gay, or unhappy, or unmarried, if you are entirely without family, where is the comfort and support and hope? Where is the common kindness for those persons in our vaulted idolatry of the traditional family?

This is what Jesus is calling us to embrace today. That family is a larger concept than our narrow view. That the relationships we value and what results from them is not necessarily found only on the narrow genetic, nuclear family scale but on the kingdom scale.

I referred earlier to Harry Potter having a “found family.” It is an expression that we’ve only been using for a few decades, but it is a concept that is as old as humanity.

Ian’s family, huge and impoverished, could not drive him to school outings, so you threw him in your car. And he stayed with you for supper on and off for, oh, as long as you can remember.

Someone your son served with in Afghanistan came back different and is more comfortable in your family room than his parents. So, there are very few Sundays during football season that he is not there.

Its Thanksgiving and your divorced friend is going to binge *The Office* alone in her home. But you make her a part of your Thanksgiving dinner and now her funeral potatoes are an essential part of your family’s tradition.

This is “found family.” Relationships based on shared experience or affinity or proximity or nothing at all. They are relationships that provide shelter, support, identity, and they require us to use a kingdom lens, rather than a conventional one.

When our conventional families aren’t present or don’t work, because of pride or vanity, fear or judgement, because of addiction, divorce, disowning, secrets or simply garden grade dysfunction, God gives *us one another*, our “found families” as evidence of a kind of love we cannot comprehend on our own.

Who are you the found family of?

Who are your “found family” children?

Who among your friends is more a brother or sister than a friend?

Who are you a “found” grandparent to?

And who is a “found family” for you?

Father's Day is one of those loaded holidays. For people who have lost their Dad. For people who are estranged from their Dad. For people who want to be a Dad and cannot. For people who are unable to be with their children. For people who have no idea who their dad is. For these people there are "found families." The "found father" who taught Ian to drive. The "found father" who let the guest-stranger carve the turkey.

There is enough love for everyone. God's love is unlimited and boundless. It is **certainly present** in our idea of family ... but not confined to it.

Harry Potter is a person entirely without any conventional family and yet, in his "found family" he experiences every possible kind of love there is. And while the world of Harry Potter is imagined, the infinite love of God is not.

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*\*I am of course aware of the ruthless cruelty perpetuated by our siblings in Christ by the author of Harry Potter books. I can't stomach it. How I have made peace with it is a story more suited to a personal conversation. If you are interested, let's book a coffee and a chat.*  
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