

## Brothers and sisters

25<sup>th</sup> September 2011

Not long before Jesus was crucified He challenged the Pharisees and teachers of the Law:

...they (the Pharisees and teachers of the Law) love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.

"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, **and you are all brothers**. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. (Matthew 23:7-9)

Another time when Jesus' mother and brothers misunderstood Him and wanted to take Him home with them, He said:

He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. **For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.**" (Matthew 12:48-50)

In Jesus' eyes, His followers were His brothers and He identified Himself as our Brother; and He said that under God and alongside Him, we are all brothers together (this is not gender specific – sisters would also be included in this)

In fact, this is the model that Jesus gave us for relating together; it's the template for us.

If we are "In Christ" then in God's eyes – we are brothers and sisters with each other in the Church:

- Around the world
- Across cultures and languages
- Across denominations – Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox
- Across theological differences
- Across old and young
- From the richest to the poorest
- From the most godly and mature to the most recent, messed up Believer

When you build a building, you get plans from the architect, and a builder regularly holds up the plans to make sure that the building is being put up the right way.

How we relate together is part of Jesus' architects plans for the Church and if we don't recognise people in the Church as our brothers and sisters, then we're not building right.

In the West, as I've said before, I think we have lost our way a bit in how we understand and relate to our families.

And I think that the danger is that we view Church more as a club than a family and in doing this, we can miss a lot of what Jesus intends for us.

So for the rest of the morning, I want to hold up this blueprint and ask the question **"What should it look like to be brothers and sisters? What do brothers and sisters do?"**

### **1. Committed to one another:**

- Unbreakable bonds

You can fall in and out of friendship with friends, but your brother and sister will be your brother and sister for life – through falling out and getting on well.

And even if you do fall out, there is a kind of safety because the bonds are unbreakable.

Friends might let you down or abandon you, but brothers or sisters can't – because it's not a relationship based on our decision to get along; with friends you make a decision to be friends with someone – hopefully for life, but you 'decide in' and so it's possible to 'decide out'. With brothers and sisters, EVEN IF a friend should let you down, a brother shouldn't; it's a relationship caused by your parents – it's out of your hands – you didn't decide in – and so you can't 'decide out'.

And with our church family, they are not family because we have chosen them; we are family because God our Father has chosen them and chosen us.

It's nothing to do with us who our Christian Family is; we didn't pick them – God did.

And because God has brought us together as His Family, under His Fatherhood, we need to realise that it's a permanent relationship; we don't have the option of just walking away from our Christian brothers and sisters and having nothing to do with them.

Friends should be friends through good times and bad, but if you're really going through the hardest time, that's what family is for:

*A friend loves at all times,  
and a brother is born for a time of adversity. (Proverbs 17:17)*

God's plan was to put us with each other so we can turn to each other in times of need;

We're meant to rejoice together when things are good and we're meant to cry together when things are hard; whatever affects one of us is meant to affect all of us – that's how families are.

If we understand this, then it changes our love for the Church around the world – and it should affect the way we commit to the local church we are part of.

We belong to each other and so there should be no place for “consumerism” – looking for what you can ‘get out of the church’ – It has not been something that has happened often for people to decide to “church hop” and go somewhere else – and sometimes there are good reasons for people to change church, but if it ever comes to it, it should be something that is thought through and talked through seriously and prayerfully and done well – not just a spur of the moment decision out of convenience or because something else is more trendy.

And if people do move on, let's do it well – in good relationship, because this isn't just like changing clubs.

We're brothers!

## 2. Purity

Secondly, a brother and sister's love for each other is pure; in 1Timothy it says:

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father.  
**Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.** (1Timothy 5:1-2)

We live surrounded by sex and immorality and it's easy for this to rub off on us without us even noticing.

And it's easy to allow the World's values to come into the Church and for us to start thinking wrongly about people within the Church.

Obviously godly marriage honours God and is a good thing – we'll talk about that in a few weeks.

But leaving aside the issue of marriage, our behaviour; our speech; our thoughts; our actions are to be pure and loving towards the opposite sex.

The New Testament isn't full of rules about segregation or wearing Hijabs or Niqabs or not sitting together or men not speaking to women, that are found in other faiths.

But it puts a higher call to purity on us by calling us to relate across sexes as brothers and sisters – with absolute purity.

In this, the Church should look absolutely different to the culture around us.

When we relate purely, as brothers and sisters, it is honouring to God and healing where we may have been hurt by the World's values elsewhere.

It means that Church is a safe place to be and it teaches us to value one another – not to lust after one another.

Let's hold up the 'plans' and measure ourselves against them: if we have let things slip in this area, let's deal with it.

Church is a family together where we can safely be ourselves before God and each other; it's not a place to flirt, to chase after the opposite sex, to allow coarse joking or rude comments come in. And it's not the place where we should look for affirmation from people in a romantic way.

(Especially) men, if you have slipped in this, you need to repent and make Church a place where your sisters are valued and honoured and protected, not a place where they are lusted after and treated like the World treats people.

In Nehemiah 4, when the Walls of Jerusalem are being rebuilt, at the weakest points of the wall, they had people building with their tools in one hand and weapons in the other and watchmen guarding them as they rebuilt; When we dabble with sexual sin, it's like a wall gets broken in our behaviour – we need to work hard to rebuild the right boundaries and as we're rebuilding, we need people watching our backs!

Let's help one another in this until purity is a strength in our church and we are relating together in an exemplary, God-honouring way as brothers and sisters.

Our call is this:

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. (Ephesians 5:3-4)

### **3. Responsibility:**

The final thing I want to talk about that brothers and sisters should do is carry responsibility for each other.

This is not just for leaders or pastors to do; we are all responsible for each other.

In Luke 15, Jesus is spending time with the messed-up people – the 'sinners' and the Religious leaders come and criticise Him and say 'why are you spending time with *them*?'

Jesus' answer is to tell 3 stories;

Firstly about a sheep that gets lost – and the owner leaves everything and goes to look and then finds it and rejoices.

Secondly He tells a story about a woman who loses a coin – and then searches and searches until she finds it, and then rejoices.

And thirdly a story about two brothers; one takes his inheritance and goes and wastes it until he is left ashamed, broken and unclean.

...And then his brother does nothing.

Finally the 'lost' brother decides to come home to his Father and his Father rejoices and welcomes him – he was lost and now he is found.

But the brother just gets angry and resents his brother and his Father.

This is a story to point out what the religious leaders were not doing; they should have been caring for their 'lost' brothers, they should have been searching for the sinners – **because that's what brothers are meant to do!**

- The shepherd found their sheep
- The woman found her coin
- But the brother didn't look for his lost brother

What Jesus was saying in this story is that we are meant to be responsible for one another – because we're brothers!

If one of us goes off the rails, we are meant to chase after them

If one of us sins – we're meant to go after them

If one of us makes a mess – we're meant to go after them, not turn a blind eye

If one of us sins – we're meant to take responsibility and go after them and find them and stand with them and support them and be there for them and love them unconditionally and win them back - because we're family – brothers and sisters; and that's what families do.

This is never an easy thing to do – it always requires courage; it is hardly ever comfortable confronting someone and challenging them about something in their lives – but I'm so glad that people have been brave enough and loving enough to do it to me.

The longer I'm a Christian, the more I see that in my life and in the lives of others, we're going to mess up; say and do the wrong things; we're going to go through really hard times; suffer loss, get hit by disappointments, have really hard struggles (and we'll have some really good times too!)

We all need to know we have brothers and sisters who'll be there for us – at our dirtiest, saddest, hardest times.

And we need to be brothers and sisters who'll be there for each other – able to cope with one another's failures.

When I first experienced the Church family it changed my life.

I believe that there are lots and lots of other people out there who, if they saw the Church being as it should be, they would want to be part of it too; who wouldn't?

And the last thing I want to say this morning is this:

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,  
is God in his holy dwelling.

God sets the lonely in families (Psalm 68:5-6)

There are many, many lonely people around, without a brother watching their backs;

There are many women who are treated badly by men and see themselves as cheap as a result;

There are lots of people who have never known security or had people stand with them

Our Father wants to bring these people into His Family; He wants to be their Father – and He wants us to be a brother and a sister to them.