

Sometimes when I ask a question I think I know already what the answer will be – with those who are getting up in years so often concerns are about health or having enough money or concern about how the world is changing and not for the better. On that day when I asked an older woman what she was concerned about I expected she would speak about one of these things. But instead she said, “What I am really concerned about is how blacks and whites get along with each other.” I did a double take – I would never have guessed that this would be on her mind. But then she told me that her grandson was part Caucasian, part African American. She was concerned about how life would be for him. When someone in the family is involved how we see things is affected.

I do not know what the Lord expected that day when he discussed Sodom and Gomorrah with Abraham. But because the Lord had big plans for Abraham and his descendants the Lord revealed to Abraham the concerns about these cities. Almost immediately Abraham began bargaining. “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked. Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?”

And the Lord said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.” You all know how the discussion went on from there – Abraham trying to whittle down the number of righteous people needed to save the city – the Lord agreeing with every reduction all the way down to ten.

In some ways this whole encounter is backwards. I would expect God to be the one arguing to save the righteous – judging by the attitude of many people I might expect Abraham to be crying out for the death penalty for the evil ones in Sodom and Gomorrah. But it is Abraham who is changing God’s mind toward mercy.

But then I remember an important fact – Abraham had family there. Lot, Abraham’s nephew, lived in Sodom. Lot’s family lived there among the wicked. This is more than a story about Abraham’s concern for the righteous – beneath that concern was a concern for family.

I am sure you have noticed how having family involved can change attitudes about many things. For the woman I talked with race relations became a vital concern because of a grandson. Having a son or daughter without a job, a mother with cancer, a nephew in prison, a child born out of wedlock, a grandson who is gay, a husband in Afghanistan, a sister with Aids – when it is in the family things look different. Attitudes change when it is in the family.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Father.” It is a family term – only children use the name, “Father.” Jesus disciples are children of God - sisters and brothers of one another.

Every time we pray Jesus prayer we remind ourselves that we are family. In the version we pray this is emphasized as we speak the word “our” – “Our Father.” Not my Father but our. Jesus does not teach us of a God who belongs to me alone but who brings us together. He did not teach us to pray, “Forgive me my sins but forgive us as we forgive those indebted to us. Family.

Family with African and South American Christians who are dying of malaria, family with Russian Christians who may live a different set of values, family with conservative Christians and liberal Christians who may not vote the way we do. We all call one God Father along with Jesus.

Every time we pray Jesus prayer we remind God to see us as family – not just as creatures to be flooded with judgement as soon as they disappoint but daughters and sons to be loved and treasured.

We pray the family prayer for God’s name to be hallowed – respected, honored, kept holy by us.

We pray the family prayer for God’s kingdom – God’s desire, God will, God’s rule to be over us and in us and through us and in all the world.

We pray for bread each day for all the family.

For forgiveness and forgiving - and to be carried through every trial and delivered from every evil – together - family.

And if we can keep on remembering that we belong to God and to everyone who calls God Father then God will have glory forever. Amen.

