**13 Pentecost 2025**

We’ve all heard the proverb “Blood is thicker than water.” The oldest record of this saying can be traced back to the 12th century in German. In English it means that family bonds will always be stronger than other relationships. However, the full proverb is: “The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb.” This reveals a deeper truth: the bonds we forge through shared experiences and chosen commitments can be just as powerful, if not more so, than those of blood relationships. [Jacob Grimm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Grimm), who wrote Grimm’s Fairytales with his brother, suggests that this saying also means that the bonds of family blood are not erased by the waters of baptism.

As a kid growing up in Johnstown, PA, about an hour east of Pittsburgh, two things were most important to me — my family and my church family at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church. They shaped me to become a person. They shaped me to eventually become a priest. My entire family is gone, except for my sister Susan who lives in Easton, Md. and we are still close. I stay in touch with some of my friends from St. Mark’s on Facebook and it is a great joy to share about our children and grandchildren, and to remember our days together at St. Mark’s. It makes the point of the old proverb: The bonds we forge through shared experiences and chosen commitments can be just as powerful, if not more so, than those of blood relation, while the bonds of family blood are not erased by the waters of baptism.

Jesus’s teaching from this morning’s gospel is challenging to be sure: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.” I think it’s a way of saying that we can over identify with our blood families and forget that there are other family-like commitments that draw us closer to God. Preparing for heaven requires us to let go of everything that we possess in this world. In part that’s what the church family helps us to do.

In another gospel story we hear “While Jesus was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothersstood outside, asking to speak to him.But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” And stretching out his hand toward 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.” Again, the bonds we forge through shared experiences and chosen commitments can be just as powerful, if not more so, than those of blood relation, while the bonds of family blood are not erased by the waters of baptism.

Today is Homecoming Sunday here at Trinity Church and in many congregations across the fruited plan. The church is every bit as much our home as the homes in which we live, maybe even more so. We’re not related by blood here for the most part, but we’re related in the blood of Christ shed upon the Cross and served in the Eucharist week in and week out. We are fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters to each other in the Holy Spirit. We help each other to let go into God in every aspect of our lives, and to trust in God’s provision and His abundant grace and mercy.

We live in a culture that prides itself on autonomy, individualism, and a will-to-power. The philosophies that undergird our culture say that we as individuals are the harbingers of truth and freedom. We don’t need people. We only allow them into our spheres of influence if they serve some kind of purpose or utility. That is, if they make us happy or feel good about ourselves in some way. These relationships are easy because we can discard the person once they no longer make us happy or feel good. This is part of the reason that so many relationships are in shambles in our culture. It is not only romantic love that suffers, it is family bonds, friendships, and our churches that suffer as well.

Christ has made it clear to us that we cannot get to heaven alone. Doing things “my” way is not the path to happiness and holiness. It is the path to destruction. We are united to one another and meant to walk together. This is a struggle for all of us who have been shaped by this ideology of individualism, but church has the remedy. People are not just showing up at church like they used to. We find ourselves in a new age of mission and evangelism. The blessings we experience here at Trinity, shaping and changing our lives, and preparing us to live with God forever, we are called to share with others outside these doors and to invite them in. It’s a simple matter of standing up for Jesus and reaching out to others in His love. We’re doing it and as we keep doing it, Trinity will continue to grow. Another old saying we all know is “Home is where the heart is.” Because our hearts are here, this is our home. Happy Homecoming 2025!

**Amen.**