

Hazelwood – Family; a gift from God.

With the last long-weekend of the summer behind us, the school year is underway. It's been a while since I laced up a new pair of shoes, tossed a pack on my back, and headed off to the hallowed halls of learning; but the memory of that first assignment remains etched in my brain. We had no sooner found our seats, when the teacher would tap a well-worn pointer on the desk and announce, "For our first assignment, I want each of you to write an essay." A collective groan preceded the announcement of "I would like to tell me all about your summer holidays."

With a sigh of resignation, a rustle of paper, and much head scratching, the exercise began. If this is still done today, I wonder if our youngest grandson, five year old Matthew, might write something like this.

*"On my summer vacation, I went on a cruise with my whole family. There were eleven of us, Grandma and Grampa (G&G), Mom and Dad, my Aunt and Uncle, my big brother James, and my three cousins. We all travelled from home and met up in Anchorage, Alaska. G&G had already been in Alaska for a week touring Denali Park and the grown-ups spent a lot of time on their phones trying to arrange a meeting place for when we got there. They decided to meet at G&G's hotel. I was a bit nervous, because I had only ever seen them on video calls since COVID had prevented them from visiting us in California. When they came into the lobby, I didn't know what to do, so I hid behind Mom's leg. Grampa got down on one knee, held out his hand, smiled at me and said, "Hello Matthew, it's great to finally see you in person." I just looked at him and stayed where I was. I think Grampa was sad at that.*

*The next morning we took a bus and then got on this huge ship. It was amazing! Our room was next to G&G and beside them were my cousins. We had a balcony, but Mom said I could only go out there with a grown-up. I wondered if that meant Grampa too. We all went swimming; except G&G, they went to the spa and the retreat. We went to the retreat later and it was real neat. There were lounge chairs and snacks and you could see the ocean all around. Mom showed me a sea otter. I liked the retreat.*

*I forgot to tell you that James and I met a bear. I think Mom and Dad were very nervous because they called us to come to them, but to move very slowly. The bear didn't care; it just wandered into the woods. He was kind of smelly.*

*Riding on the ship was super fun. I think the best part was sitting down at the big dinner table with everybody there. We all talked about what we had done that day and everybody laughed a lot. G&G sat beside me a couple of times and I got to eat as many chicken nuggets as I wanted. Grampa talked to the waiter guy and he brought me ice-cream every day. I liked the dinners the most.*

*One day we were at the retreat, looking at these big walls of ice and a piece fell into the ocean with a big splash. It made a big noise and everyone was amazed. Grampa was watching everything and when he looked at me, he smiled. I remembered that time at the hotel when he looked sad so I climbed into his lap and said, "Grampa, this is so much fun! I love you a lot." He smiled a lot; then he hugged me hard. It was nice. I think he cried a bit."*

That trip with our family was truly a gift from God. Experiencing Matthew's transformation from shy and afraid to outgoing and rambunctious was deeply moving – and yes, I did get a wee bit teary. It was an equally wonderful time with everyone else; if you'd like to hear more, just ask.

I will be bold here and suggest that one of the greatest gifts that God gave to mankind was the family unit. God ordained that men and women would be united as one-flesh (**Genesis 2:24**). This union would result in children, thus forming a family – God's vision of the building block of society.

The family is where we are trained, taught, and learn to know that we belong. Every member of the family, whether there are a few, or many, develops a sense of belonging that gives them a feeling of self-worth. The family is a place where we can feel safe, where we can feel loved, and where we can establish roots that will guide us through the rest of life. Some people come from a large family where you can trace your ancestry through centuries; while for others it may be a generation or so. Some belong to families that seem to get along with each other pretty well; while there are some families that simply cannot agree on anything. We often find the same sort of things within our church family.

In the New Testament, Jesus establishes the theological (church) family by saying, *“whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”* **Matthew 12:50 (NIV)**. I do not believe for a moment that Jesus is suggesting that our birth family is unimportant (that would be contrary to God’s plan), but rather he is saying that in the Kingdom of Heaven, it is the spiritual family, and our connection to God, and each other, as his children, that is most important.

In the beginning, God said, *“It is not good for man to be alone”*. For this reason, it is good that we congregate as believers and form a church. It is good that we love and support each other along the way; and it is good that we have respect, and understanding with each other when we may not see eye to eye on how to respond to a situation.

In early September all of the Elders met informally to discuss how we could best work together to lead both the Grace and Living Faith congregations through the upcoming period of transition. From the outset, it was quite clear that we all saw the need to focus on the fact that the Living Faith church plant is being established for no other reason than to provide a safe landing space for anyone who wishes to remain faithful to the Bible’s teachings and worship solely under the authority of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. I left that meeting feeling very positive about the future.

The Living Faith congregation is busily addressing the myriad of detail needed to grow and develop into a church that will fill an important need in Orleans and beyond. We have completed the first step in the legal process and are now working with CRA to achieve charitable status. Bank accounts have been established and bills are starting to be paid. We look forward to finding our niche ministry within the community and also to finding ways to continue in fellowship and ministry with our Grace family.

When Grace Church was established, we often sang a simple and very beautiful worship song, the last line of which forms my prayer for all of us as we move through this period of transition, *“May we learn to love each other more with each new day; may words of love be on our lips, in ev’ry thing we say. May the Spirit melt our hearts, and teach us how to pray, that we might be a true family.”*<sup>1</sup>

Amen  
Donald

---

<sup>1</sup> Welcome to the Family, Words and Music By: Debby Kerner Rettino © 1982 Rettino Kerner Publishing— [www.psalty.com](http://www.psalty.com)