

All in the Family—God's Family, Hebrews 2:1-15, 1 Peter 2:5-15

At Rotary Club meetings, one member usually stands up to give a brief presentation on his line of work. So, when the local pastor came to the podium, he said: "*I am a member of a family owned and operated enterprise that went global centuries ago. We now have branches in every country in the world and representatives in nearly every parliament and boardroom on earth. We're into motivation and behavioral alteration—**changed lives is our main product.** We run hospitals, schools, feeding stations, crisis pregnancy centers, universities, publishing houses, and nursing homes. We care for our clients from birth to death. We are into life insurance and fire insurance. We perform spiritual heart transplants. Our product is free for the asking, because there's not enough money to buy it.*

Our original founder owns all the real estate on earth plus an assortment of galaxies and constellations. He knows everything and lives everywhere. Our CEO was born in a hick town, worked as a carpenter, didn't own a home, was hated by enemies, walked on water, condemned to death without a trial, but then arose from the dead—and I talk with him every day."

"you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people." 1 Peter 2:9,10a

God's people! I really like that label.

On this 4th Sunday in advent, Let us think about love and how we became God's people. Why should we do this? Because it is God's love for us, revealed to us by his son Jesus that has made us into His family, God's people.

- God's love has always been about making us family.
- And through Jesus Christ that is what we have become...family.
- With him, what we have been given...is the family home.
- And also along with him, we receive responsibility for the family business.

So, let's start with our scripture from Hebrews where we hear the startling, glorious Advent news that God sent His son into our world—certainly to save us—but also to make us into family; God in a very real sense is our father and Jesus our brother.

Verse five begins with a very interesting observation: that God could have chosen to put the whole planet under the control of His angels, but for some reason He decided instead to give that task to us humans. Then verse 6 continues on to ask the obvious question:

What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? (vs. 6)

That is a very good question.
Why is God so concerned about us humans?
What more does he want out of us?

You have made human beings for a little while lower than the angels...subjecting all things under their feet.'
(vs. 7, 8)

Isn't that enough? God created us; He gave us life and this land to live in; and it seems that he intended for us continue on with the same blessing which He gave to our first parents.

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." Genesis 1:28

But then the next verse points out that we apparently failed at our job.

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control.

[But] as it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them
Hebrews 2:6-8 (*quoting Psalm 8:4-6*)

Something must have gone wrong, got broken; something remains unfinished. We humans have not succeeded in the task God gave us.

And did you catch that earlier hint that we were actually meant for something more than planetary caretakers to begin with?

You have made human beings for a little while lower than the angels
(v. 7)

The author of Hebrews seems to be implying that, amazingly, in the hierarchy of Heaven, God wants us for something more than servants. Angels, not us humans, were created specifically to be God's servants; like Gabriel who met with Mary and Joseph.

So, follow along with me and let's see if we can put all these pieces together. God could have put the planet in the care of angels—his very competent servants—and they certainly would have done a better job of it than we have until now. But instead He

gave this planetary task into the care of us humans—who are much less powerful and capable than His angels...and at that task, we have apparently not yet succeeded.

BUT, by implication, both our planetary responsibilities and our lower than angel status are only temporary assignments. God apparently has always intended us for something more.

What is that more which God wants of us?
Why is he so concerned for us?

God wants a parent/child relationship with us.
God wants us to be family.

According to our Hebrew author, while as mere humans, we are lower than the angels in both power and status, as God's children we will become so much more than them. So even though we have failed in our first responsibility, we are still being promoted to a rank even higher than God's servants; which makes no sense at all from a corporate standpoint, but often makes good sense when it is a family business.

And what is God's key to make us failed humans into His own family?
He himself took on flesh, becoming like us—becoming a little lower than the angels—becoming "God with us" in order to break the curse that has long kept us from becoming like him.

but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was
made lower than the angels...so that by the grace of God

he might destroy the one who has the power of death and free those
held enslaved by the fear of death (vs. 9,14,15)

For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified
all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call
them brothers and sisters, (vs. 11)

(Pause)

So there you have it, God the Father sent Jesus into our world to accomplish the task of making us family. And, Jesus succeeded. We now see Jesus crowned with glory and honor and offering to share the same glory and honor with us who he unashamedly names as his brothers and sisters.

Jesus became like us (for a while a little lower than the angels) so we could become like him forever—members of God’s family.

That is what Christmas is all about (at least from God’s point of view)--God demonstrating His love for us by gifting us with his son Jesus. And then Jesus demonstrated his love for us by going to the cross to taste death for each of us so that by his resurrection he might free us from the fear of death forever.

"For God so loved us, that He gave us his one and only son that whoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

Jesus’ willingness to come into our world and be “God with us” was perhaps his second greatest act of love; going to the cross for us was his first.

The only question that remains is this. How we should respond to such displays of overwhelming love? How do we even begin to try to show our eternal gratitude to God our Father and Jesus our brother?

Thankfully, the Apostle Peter has a few suggestions for our appropriate response.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house,

to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:4

The temple in Jerusalem was a form of “spiritual house” but it was made of dead stone, unmovable, and could only be entered by a few designated priests. And while God told Solomon he would be attentive to prayers uttered there—he also was clear that it would never be a house He would live in. Also, as He said in so many other places in the scriptures, God actually prefers justice, mercy, and a humble relationship with us, over any animal sacrifices we might offer.

So now, through the gift of life that Jesus has given us, like himself we can become living stones forming a living temple of God—God now living with us and in us—we have become His proper home, we have become His family. Have you ever seen a singing Christmas tree; a triangular shaped platform filled with chorus members belting out Christmas carols? Well we are the living temple God made up of all His children living out those Christmas carols all year long.

And we are also built together with Jesus not so much to make another unmovable structure but to be rather a dynasty of heirs—like the house of David—only we are now of the house of Jesus; his brothers, his sisters, brought together into a family where by our very lives we offer God the appropriate sacrifices of love and service given in His name; which is what He has always wanted for us and from us.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **God's own people**, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 1 Peter 2:9

We are God's own people. Family!

Think about that for a moment.

That is what you have become through Jesus.

What do you think of yourself now?

So God's love—demonstrated to us with the coming of Jesus into our world—has now transformed us into family. Let's bring one more aspect of Advent into all this. The word **advent** literally means "to come," "to appear," or "to dawn," in other words Advent is all about coming into the light.

And did you notice what God expects us to now be doing? You might say the family business is all about lighting our world (God's Eternal Power and Light Co.). Jesus came into the world as the light shining in our darkness. And now we are supposed to be out there promoting the same product: talking about God's marvelous love and His eternal family and how when you come to Jesus you too become people of the light—Advent people.

God's people. Advent people. Family.

Yes, I really like those labels.

Now let's get out there and let our little Advent lights shine.