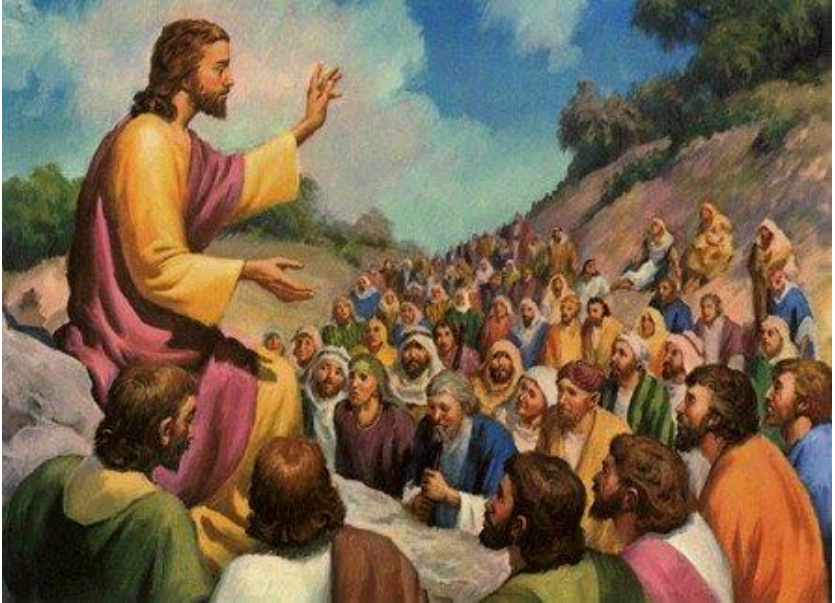


# Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

## SERMON FOR

October 4, 2015



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister  
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister  
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children's Minister  
Lucia Gallo: Lay Reader

## ***Menifee United Church of Christ***

*Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM*

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***Live Life Fully Alive!***

### **Psalm 8:1-5**

*O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.*

### **Hebrews 2:10-12**

*It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 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, saying, 'I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.'*

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### *Jesus Calls You His Sibling*

\* \* \* \* \*

A Sunday School teacher was talking to her students about the Ten Commandments. She talked with them about the commandment to “honor thy Father and thy Mother.” Then she asked, “Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?” One little boy, who had several brothers and sisters said, “Yes. ‘Thou shall not kill.’”

We can joke about sibling rivalries, but: sibling rivalries are ridiculous. It doesn't mean they don't happen. We know they do. Sometimes they even turn violent. But why? Siblings share the same parents. Siblings share much of the same DNA. Siblings often share the same hair color and eye color. Maybe we see ourselves in our siblings and if we don't like ourselves, then we don't like our siblings.

If sibling rivalries are ridiculous: Religious rivalries are ridiculous, too. It doesn't mean they don't happen. We know they do. Sometimes they even turn violent. But why? Religions often share the same Supreme Being, regardless of what that Supreme Being is called. Maybe we see ourselves in our religious rivals and if we don't like ourselves, then we don't like our religious rivals.

How about you? Do you get along with your siblings? I hope we all do. Just like I hope we all get along with people of the Christian faith and with people of all other faiths. I have to believe that's what Jesus would want us to do.

Jesus calls us his brothers and sisters, according to the writer of Hebrews. Jesus says to God, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters." Jesus is talking about us! Isn't that amazing? You are Jesus' brother! You are Jesus' sister! Hopefully we don't have a sibling rivalry with our brother Jesus. What does it mean to be Jesus' brothers and sisters?

Well, Jesus was human and divine. And he says he's our brother. Or we are his brothers and sisters. So we must be human and divine, also. What does it mean to be human and divine? It means God made us from the dust of the earth and God breathed the spirit of heaven into us. In other words, we are a combination of earth and heaven.

It's not just the people in this church who are Jesus' brothers and sisters, of course. God no. All people are Jesus' brothers and sisters: Christians and Jews, Buddhists and Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. We are all children of God. We are all made in the image of God. We are all loved by God. We are all equal in the eyes of God. And we are all Jesus' brothers and sisters.

Do you agree? Do you see Jesus as your brother, as your next of kin? I hope so, because then, in an emergency, you can contact your next of kin, Jesus. "Yeah, Jesus, it's me, your brother. (Or: Yeah, Jesus, it's me, your sister.) And I need your help." That's what Jesus is there for. That's what Jesus is here for. To help his family members: You and me and everyone.

Jonathan Edwards was a Protestant preacher and theologian back in the 1700s. His most famous sermon was, "Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God." When someone's theology posits "an angry God," you know things aren't going to be too fun. And they're not. Jonathan Edwards pictures God holding us "over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider" over a fire. And in case we missed the point, according to Jonathan Edwards, God "detests" us. Yikes!

If I really believed that God detests us, and I was a Protestant preacher and theologian, I would find a more joyful line of work. Like lion tamer. Or bomb defuser. Oy vey! I don't believe God sees us as spiders that God would like to hold over the pit of hell. God is a Supreme Being. Not a Supreme Bully.

I can't imagine ever writing a sermon entitled, "Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God." First of all, I don't see human beings as sinners. I see them as saints who sometimes make mistakes. Second of all, I could never describe God as angry, because anger is one of the seven deadly sins, so how could God be described as a sinner? It makes no sense. Maybe I could write, "Souls In The

Hands Of A Loving God.” (Hey, I like that title, maybe one day I’ll use it as the title of a sermon.)

What do you think? Do you describe human beings as sinners? Do you describe God as angry? This is a United Church of Christ church, so you’re free to describe human beings and God as you think best. And I’m a United Church of Christ minister, so I’m free to describe human beings and God as I think best. Therefore, I describe human beings as “fallible saints,” and I describe God as “the unconditional lover of fallible saints.”

The Psalmist addresses God directly. The Psalmist wonders, “what are human beings that you are mindful of them?” “Yet you have made them a little lower than God.” We’re a little lower than God?! Holy cow! (That’s an old Hindu saying, by the way. At least I think it is.) We’re not sinners, we’re not spiders, in spite of what Jonathan Edwards believes. We’re a little lower than God. And Jesus calls us his brothers and sisters.

Those are the Jesus and God that I grew up with. When I was a kid we sang, “Jesus loves me, this I know.” We did not sing, “Jesus loathes me, this I know.” Also when I was a kid, when it came to God, we sang, “He’s got the whole world in his hands.” We did not sing, “He’s got the whole world in his hands, and he’s going to crush us like a spider, because he detests us.”

I should feel sorry for those who see God as angry. And I do. And I do because I understand that if they see our Heavenly Father as angry, chances are it’s because their earthly father was angry. But their earthly father is not the same as our Heavenly Father. God is more loving than that. God is more compassionate than that. God is more joyful than that. God would have to be better than that or God wouldn’t be God. God would be an angry, mean, wrathful being. Admittedly, that is how God is sometimes portrayed in the Hebrew scriptures. But

then in the Christian New Testament, God's son, Jesus, our brother, is usually portrayed as a loving, peaceful, understanding being. And if God and Jesus are one, how could they be that diametrically opposite of each other and still be one?

Who's the God you believe in? Who's the God you pray to? Do you pray to an angry God? Or do you pray to a loving God? Do you fear God? Or do you love God? Do you believe God abhors you? Or do you believe God adores you? I hope you see our Heavenly Father as even better than the best earthly father.

Pope Francis, the Holy Father, when he visited the United States last week, embodied our God and our brother Jesus when he blessed a boy with cerebral palsy. And when he had his Pope Mobile stop so a little child could be brought to him for a blessing. And when he blessed children all during his visit. I know I'm a Protestant pastor, but in those moments I became a temporary Catholic. I certainly wouldn't hesitate to call Pope Francis my brother.

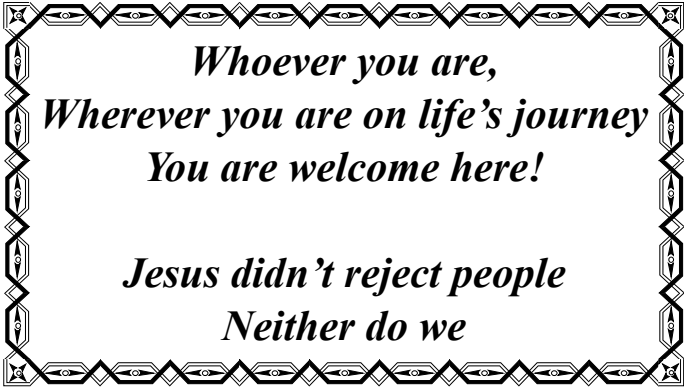
After all, Jesus calls us his brothers and sisters. Not his step-brothers and step-sisters. We're not adopted by God into God's family. We are part of God's family. We are created by God. We are made in the image of God. We are blessed by God. We are loved by God. We are children of God. So if Jesus is the Son of God, and he calls us his brothers and sisters, then that makes us the Sons and Daughters of God, doesn't it?

Can you believe that? Can you believe that we are the Sons and Daughters of God? I hope so. I hope you can believe Jesus when he calls us his brothers and sisters. I hope you can believe that you are the Son or Daughter of God. And I hope you can believe that God loves you the way good parents love their children: Unconditionally. Now, if you had abusive parents, don't take them as the role model for God. God is not an abusive

parent. God is an effusive parent. God is a loving parent who loves us unconditionally. I believe that. I hope you believe that, too. But whatever you believe: God bless you and God bless Menifee United Church of Christ.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,  
Help us to believe that Jesus is our brother.  
Help us to believe that we are your children.  
And help us to believe that you love us.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.*

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*Whoever you are,  
Wherever you are on life's journey  
You are welcome here!*

*Jesus didn't reject people  
Neither do we*

## THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you  
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would  
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his  
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others  
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself  
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,  
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others  
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people  
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism