

# Sermons at Oak Grove

October 5, 2008

---

*Exodus 20:1-2*

*“Family Values”  
By Andries J. Coetzee*

## **Scripture Readings: Exodus 20:1-2**

Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;

## **Sermon: “Family Values”**

By now I don't have to remind you that today is World Communion Sunday, which also means that today is the first Sunday in October, we are in the midst of another fall and are approaching winter. It is with excitement that Beth, the kids, and I are enjoying the arrival of this beautiful season with its amazing colors, refreshing mornings, and Honey Crisp apples. But in all honesty it is with some degree of shock that we realize that we are actually looking forward to another winter here in Minnesota. I never could have imagined that people from sunny, warm South Africa and Texas could say that!

Yes, we have come to love Minnesota. We see Bloomington as our home and Oak Grove Presbyterian Church as our family of faith. To us this community of faith gives expression to our call to “do justice and to love kindness” (Micah 6:8), and our town of Bloomington gives expression to family values that Minnesota has become known for, nationwide. This is indeed a good place to live and a great place to call home!

Being raised with family values myself, I can remember my parents telling me to always greet another person with a firm handshake and a smile and to make direct eye contact. These values, taught from generation to generation, are what guide us through life, orientate us, and motivate us. Values are the framework from which we make decisions, mostly sub-conscious, from day to day to help us discern between right and wrong, good and bad.

It is to people like us, people who embrace the family that our reading from Exodus was speaking to: “<sup>2</sup>I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”. It is with love and compassion that this God, who here speaks to God’s people for the first time, addresses them as God’s children. We have been following the Israelites journey through the desert and have come to know them these past weeks as a rebellious people, longing for their lives back in Egypt, and still God comes to them addressing them by saying: “I am the Lord your God”. Before you are a people, before you adhere to any one of my commandments ... I want to be your God, as I am your Savior, the One who saved you from slavery.

It is in grace that God embraces God’s people in the commandments and accepts and loves them, even without them adhering to any of the commandments. Psalm 103 proclaims that: “<sup>8</sup>The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” For us as children of the Reformation, for us as Presbyterians, this is the heartbeat of the Gospel ... that God is grace!

It is in grace that God speaks to us when we baptize our children, when we confirm our youth, and when we bury our loved ones. It is in grace that God speaks to us in the middle of the night, lying awake, feeling anxious and alone. It is in grace that God speaks to us in the wind, in four seasons, in friends, and here at Oak Grove Presbyterian Church as we sit around this table set before us, saying: I am the Lord your God ... I became human so you can have life and have it in abundance!

Today on this World Communion Sunday in a world where politics has undermined peace and justice – and in a time when fear divides ... we hear Christ’s voice in grace saying ... “I am setting a banquet before you where people will come from East and West and from North and South.” At this table I am the host and I invite young and old, male and female, and red and yellow, black and white, to come and join in the feast prepared for you.

This table makes us realize that for too long, exclusively valuing family has kept us from seeing the stranger, from welcoming them, from embracing them. Growing up, family values kept me from looking a black person in the eye, as I only greeted people by hand

that looked like me, that talked like me, that thought like me, that belonged to my “family”.

For too long we have been more concerned with our own need for grace rather than being graceful toward others, and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. See, family values can have a way of making us think of our neighbor as a person who looks like us, and of making us deny that we are part of a bigger world and proclaim a return to petty, small-minded parochialism.

Family values can keep us from seeing the stranger as a person and a human being created in the image of God. It makes us look at our own faith and think we have the only way to salvation and truth. Therefore I am grateful that we have our brothers and sisters from the Bloomington Muslim Community Centre with us today affirming a need for all people of faith to stand together promoting understanding, mutual respect, and dignity for all God’s children. Together we give rise to a new family where our value system encourages us to embrace the stranger and care for the vulnerable among us, for even they are part of us. In this new family we realize we belong to a bigger world and a larger reality. In this family we know that God created each one of us uniquely, and did an exceptional job in doing so. Therefore, we need one another, to make the broken whole.

Today on World Communion Sunday, Christ, the Prince of Peace, calls us anew to be peacemakers by building this new human family, where we befriend the rejected, invite the alienated, offer love without qualification, and set people free from fears and animosities that set us apart.

I am excited today as we are indeed seeing people that came from North and South and East and West to join us around this table .... And together we see a glimpse of a world in which justice and peace has prevailed.

Amen