

Time to Celebrate the Family

Pastor Al Schroeder

I find that I get quite excited when I see a young family, father and mother and a child or several. I see them when I go on my daily walking. I see them in the grocery store. In this month of Thanksgiving, let us give thanks to the great Creator for this wonderful way of life for the society. As we know, the family is the core and beginning of community and society. Here is where children are born. They learn to live with each other in daily play and work. From the start of life, a child learns love in the arms of mother. A child sees mother and father interacting with each other. At the parents guiding, children learn to play with each other, and they learn to work it out when they do not get along with each other. In the family the child learns life skills. Children will be assigned to take chores, and they learn to be depended on for those responsibilities. They learn to respect each other in the home.

I am celebrating my family that I grew up in. I look back on our home experience with much joy and gratitude. It might not have been. My younger sister Elizabeth came down with cancer early in 1984. When I went to visit her at home on the farm where we grew up, I realized that my 84 year old mother needed help through this. I got some leave from my churches, Faith in Johnstown [Colorado] and Zion in Wellington [Colorado], to do what I needed to do. I went back three times for a total of twelve weeks. She died December 3. One afternoon late in the year my mother and I came home from the care facility in New Haven, Indiana, where Elizabeth was dying. My mother hauled out her favorite book of photos and sat down at the kitchen table. Soon she looked up at me and said, "I never wanted to marry and have my own children. I wanted to teach other people's children." My mother did teach school for some years. "Why was that?" I asked. "My home life was so bad," she replied. "What changed your mind?" I asked. "Your Dad did." I knew some of the stories from my grandparents' family life, but I never saw it that way. Grandpa had been a highly successful farmer who bought the land from his father-in-law, who was a son of a Dutch pioneer who had large land holdings. Grandpa built the farmstead and enjoyed success. Tensions there were between the oldest son Martin and his father.

My parents Reinhardt and Ella spent much time together in the active young adults fellowship at Saint John Lutheran Church in the farm community near Fort Wayne. They made the decision to marry just as the Great Depression began in 1929. What would their future be? Mother's parents gave them a farm they had acquired. As Dad said, it had been worked 100 years and was worn out. German pioneers came in the 1830s and '40s to start farms. He worked to make it productive again. During WWII the Agriculture Department made materials available to further productivity, and the farm extension agent from Purdue U. was available to advise. The house was not livable, so Dad began, from the time of their engagement on and through the years of my growing up, to make it a lovely home. They were married in 1932, and I was their first-born a year later. Elizabeth came four years later, and after two years my brother Norbert. Mom worked with Dad until I could drive the horses and later the new tractor.

We were a devout Christian family. Dad led us in prayer before and after meals. My Dad knelt with me beside the bed and taught me an evening prayer. Proper behavior was taught by

example. Not much needed to be said. Mother applied her teaching skills to family life. Dad was the disciplinarian. Mother and Dad talked matters over reasonably, and we never saw any angry fighting. Mother was the more emotionally responsive, and Dad tended to be quiet and reserved, but definitely the leader of the family. All three of us children had our chores to do. There was milking the cows morning and evening. Cattle and chickens had to be fed. Manure had to be cleared out. The whole range of field work had to be done. At this fall season I recall harvesting corn. At first we husked by hand, then later with more modern machinery. At first we used horses, until Dad could be ready to buy a tractor (only after going to the bank) in the mid-forties. As crops brought income, Dad would buy furniture, in stages over the years. While renovating the house, a room at a time, as the first son, I was his helper from early on.

I reflect on our family story a great deal these days. It troubles me how family life and home life, as much as communities and society over all have been breaking up. Since the 1940s, after the war, we have seen all relationships breaking down. There was a widely-read book, *The Lonely Crowd*. Divorces began appearing and marriage and family life broke down. We now have a polarized, splintered, and seemingly aimless society. Since the 1960s our society has become highly sexualized, a huge contrast from before. Then married couples made love to bring children into the world. Now the careless and reckless sexual indulgence will be followed with destruction of the conception that ensues. Note that sexually transmitted diseases are reported at rapid rise. The news reports widespread concern about poor mental health among our children. Does this come from the love and care they missed in broken families, single parent families, and dysfunctional families? Why do we hear of so many young adults after college going back home to live? Have they not learned life skills? Or sense of direction and purpose? All this grieves me, and then my home life appears ever more wonderful, as I recall it.

I am celebrating my family. I delight to see new young families, and sometimes I stop to bless them. Here is the promise and possibility of hope! Let's celebrate all the good new families who are doing things right! I would also strongly urge return to the Christian ethic and values and faith on which the founding fathers based the American experiment.

We could hardly have known a better rearing. My brother came to work in Washington D.C. when he finished college and his time with the air force. He married and began his family. He had gained degrees in computer science and law, and he worked for Voice of America and other programs in the Commerce Department. His work took him to many countries. My sister did not marry, but the church was jammed with friends at her celebration of life service. I have served my working life in the churches, doing missions and pastoral care until retirement.

My parents' life was not all a bed of roses, as they say. Dad suffered with asthma all his life, and Mom often tended to him, ever patiently and lovingly. His lungs and heart wore out. What that man achieved in his lifetime gives me thrills when I recall the memories. On Sunday, November 1, 1959, I received a phone call from my brother Norb, "Dad died at 1:00 this afternoon." I learned later that he had spent some days in the hospital in Decatur. He had gone around in that morning to visit friends and cheer them up. After lunch he and Mom were sitting on the bed, when he turned to her. He died in her arms. It was November 1, All Saints' Day.