

The Gospel According to KEVIN! (or *How You Feel About Your Family is a Complicated Thing*)

John 2:1-12

Sunday, April 23, 2023

Habits are a very important thing. Habits can reset us when it feels like life is getting out of control. Habits ground us in what things are most important. Habits help us keep the most important things as the most important thing.

Habits can also be silly, but still helpful.

My annual advent habit is to watch ONLY Christmas movies and TV shows and listen ONLY to Christmas music. The list of Christmas media is unending, so I never reach the end of it all. By taking the four weeks leading up to Christmas to watch and hear only Christmas stuff, I find myself more rooted in Christmas, both in the deep spiritual side of the season and in the fun of the season. For four weeks I'm up to my eyeballs on the incarnation and Christmas cheer.

As you can imagine, certain Christmas movies get watched every single year. What do you think some of my go-to Christmas movies are?

An annual go to in our house is Home Alone. 8 year old Kevin McAllister is sick of his large family. They annoy him, he annoys them. So he wishes his family would disappear.

He gets his wish! His family accidentally leaves him behind from the family Christmas trip to Paris. Kevin has to learn to live on his own and defend his home against bandits.

Kevin has always been afraid of his elderly neighbour. But on Christmas Eve, they end up in the same church sitting in the same pew. And this year, as I watched the movie, I heard the truest thing I've ever heard in any movie.

Let's set the scene. I need a couple of volunteers. One to be Kevin and one to be the elderly neighbour.

Marley: You've been good this year?

Kevin: I think so.

Marley: You swear to it?

Kevin: No.

Marley: Yeah. Well, this is the place to be if you're feeling bad about yourself.

Kevin: It is?

Marley: I think so.

Kevin: Are you feeling bad about yourself?

Marley: No.

Kevin: I've been kind of a pain lately. I said some things I shouldn't have. I really haven't been too good this year. Yeah. I'm kind of upset because I really like my family. Even though sometimes I say I don't. Sometimes I even think I don't. Do you get that?

Marley: I think so. How you feel about family is a complicated thing.

Kevin: Especially with an older brother.

Marley: Deep down, you'll always love him. But you can forget that you love him. You can hurt them, they can hurt you. That's not just because you're young.

And, "scene".

When I heard the words, "How you feel about family is a complicated thing," I wanted to blurt out "yes!" in response! "Amen!" Whatever our personal family history is like, it can be amazing. But it can also be devastatingly hurtful and painful. No one can love us like family. But no one can hurt us like family.

As you go through different stages with your family, the complications increase! Children can find themselves caring for parents. It's hard to be far from family. It can be hard to live close to family. Family feels like there are no end to complications, grievances and pain.

Sadly, church has the reputation of being the place and people where you cannot have a complicated family. It feels like the place you can't have a different kind of family. Somehow church has the reputation of multiplying the cookie-cutter nuclear family. And if you don't have the cookie-cutter, nuclear family, we don't know what to do with you.

Which is so weird, because have any of us read the Bible?

The author Jonathan Merritt was speaking with someone that had very strong views about how a "biblical family" looked and behaved. To which Jonathan replied, "OK, from the Bible, give me an example." The advocate for the "biblical family" was stumped.

There are good instructions about being a family in Scripture. There is teaching we can hear and apply that helps us build the character to be reliable family members and friends.

But the model family? Read through the book of Genesis and give me an example of the model family. I can find polygamy. I can find marriages between cousins. Jacob had cousins so nice he married them twice! But it's pretty hard to find the ideal that we keep presenting to people. It's impossible to find the lived out ideal that we keep clobbering people with.

I'm not trying to undermine the Bible and its teaching. Again, it tells us very important things about how to live well with one another. But the ideal that we expect of people is simply not lived out in its pages. What we find instead is broken people loved by God being used to change the world for good.

Which brings us to our passage in the book of John. "How you feel about family is a complicated thing" – that was also true about Jesus! The book of John opens speaking highly of Jesus in cosmic terms. He's the Word of God. He was with God in the beginning. Everything was made through Jesus. In him is life. Jesus, very God, incarnate as a human, living among people yet not fully understood by them. Jesus, Lord of all, with God from the very beginning.

And in chapter two we meet his family. His flesh and blood family. There always seems to be tension between Jesus and his family. The eternal God that we worship has a family when he lives on earth, and I get the impression that they annoy one another.

Later in the book of John, this interaction between Jesus and his brothers is mentioned:

Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do." ⁴ No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world."⁵ For even his own brothers did not believe in him. (John 7:3-5)

Even the Son of God, our model for life, has a complicated family. Sometimes, it seems, that Jesus is the complicated member of that family.

When the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in all ways like we are, we know this is true; because Jesus had a family! What is more crazy-making and tempting you to behave badly than that? What source of guilt can be greater than that?

In the story Troy read this morning, it's Jesus mother Mary that seems to be making life complicated for him. *A wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.* A single man is at a wedding with his mom. The stage is already set for all kinds of awkwardness. I read a quote last night that said, "Weddings are accidents waiting to happen." But beyond the usual awkwardness the wedding has a problem. The wedding has run out of wine, which is a massive hospitality mistake.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, tells him the news. And like only a family member can do, she does this telling him to do something about it without telling him to do something about it.

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." Her words have elbows to them. There's a wink and a nudge buried in these words. There's an expectation that Jesus do something about this.

Woman,^[a] why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

Now, I was really hoping that when Jesus called his mother "woman" that this could be taken in any number of ways. That this use of calling his mother "woman" could capture so many emotions and frustrations that can exist within a family. But they don't. When I read this, the footnote said "The Greek for woman does not denote any disrespect." But regardless, Jesus says it is not time for me to intervene in a miraculous way.

But it does not seem that Mary has fully given up. *His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."* Mary said what she said to her son, the Son of God, and it seems she still thinks there should be some sort of miracle today.

Jesus turns the water into wine, a miracle takes place, and the wine made in the miracle far surpasses the original wine that was prepared for a wedding.

In the book of John, this is Jesus' first miracle. The very first one.

So does this miracle take place if Mary does not nag or lean on the person that's the Word of God, the one with God before creation? Does none of this take place without the awkwardness and messiness that was Jesus family?

Every miracle in the book of John represents a bigger reality. The miracles in John aren't just opportunities for Jesus to be kind, or to be helpful in a spontaneous situation. Every miracle in the book of John points to a greater reality.

'The wedding at Cana, in fact, serves as a foreshadowing of a great heavenly banquet, where Jesus is the groom. And he invites everyone, not just in one whole town, but across many nations. It's not just a weeklong wedding celebration, but an eternal one, with Jesus as host.'
(Blog Post By Abram K-J on abramkj.com)

Does this bigger purpose of this miracle get missed without the awkward behaviour of mom at a wedding? If someone were to ask, "Why did Jesus choose the wedding at Cana for his first miracle?" A possible answer might be – Jesus didn't choose this. His mom did!

But because she did, what we read about Jesus earlier in John is proven true: *We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

We have a Saviour in Jesus that we worship and revere. He's holy. There is none like him. And this same recipient of our worship lived in family, just like us.

I will never pretend to know what it is like for you in your particular situation with your own family. I will never fully know that or feel that. I won't be able to say to you, "I know what that's like" because family is messy and awkward and painful and lonely by times in its own very specific way. It's also loss. It's a very unique experience for everyone that has been part of one.

But it is amazing to me, that when God comes to earth, God very purposefully lives within a family, and all the awkwardness that this entails. And that family is tense, and by times lonely and painful. And sometimes they just go to weddings and then go hang out after.

Jesus knows the mess of what family is like. He intentionally lived in it. He knows you. He knows your family. He knows your hurts, your shame, your heart. He knows your great joy and great disappointments.

He has truly lived the human experience. Jesus is God with us. Know that in what you are experiencing today.

Christ have mercy as he is present with us and with our connections to one another.