

Sermon for Sunday, May 1, 1977, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri, 63105

"WHEN GOD GETS A 'LOANER'"  
I Samuel 1:21-28

Text: "' Therefore I have lent him to the Lord, as long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord,' And they worshipped the Lord there."  
--I Samuel 1:28

Next Sunday is Mother's Day. Since I won't be here, I want to take opportunity this morning to talk about the Christian family. One author speaks of the Christian family and writes, "the family counts. It is humanity's primary cell. If a nation's homes disintegrate, nothing can be right. That same writer goes on to add, "call that exaggeration if you will, but the fact remains that the world never gets a Christ, or anyone Christlike, except through a holy family." Within a few days I will be standing in the city of Nazareth and we will visit the church that marks the site where Jesus grew up as a boy. Carved into the side of the church are three figures, Mary, Joseph and the boy Jesus. Over the top it says, "The Holy Family". And I suppose it is still true that the world never gets a Christ or anyone Christlike except through a holy family.

One of the most serious threats to the home for today is the threat that comes from within. It is true that there are many pressures and tensions brought to bear on the home today from without. Yet, if the home is strong from within, all of the pressures from without cannot destroy it. Dietrick Bonhoeffer was a German Christian who was imprisoned and executed by Hitler during the Second World War. While in prison, he wrote a letter to his family at Christmas. In part this is what he said, "I need not tell you how much I long to be released and to see you all again. But for years you have given us such lovely Christmases, that our grateful memories are strong enough to cast their rays over a darker one. In times like these we learn as never before what it means to possess a past and a spiritual heritage untrammelled by the changes and chances of the present. A spiritual heritage reaching back for centuries is a wonderful support and comfort in face of all temporary stresses and strains." (Prisoner for God) Here we see the picture of a man in prison, his only crime is serving God, and he is soon to be put to death for his faith. Yet, in the midst of the worst that life can do to him, he finds a bright Christmas in his heart. He is able to draw upon the resources of having lived in a Christian home and those grateful memories are strong enough to cast their rays over a darker time.

One of the questions I would like to ask this morning is this: is that the kind of home you have? Is your home a home where the Christian experience of the family is such that in a time of trial and trouble, the memories of the past will sustain them?

You see, a child does not learn about love by discussion, but by being loved. He does not learn about self-giving through theory, but by the example of self-giving he finds in the family. By the same token, he learns about God from his parents. In prayers at meals and at bedtime, in the parents' attitude toward church and school, in the parents' attitude as to how life will be spent, in their attitude about what is important in life, what is worth supporting and investing in,....in such simple ways he learns what God means to his mother and his father and he will not be much different from that.

Let's ask ourselves as parents some questions this morning. Why is it that many of our children are not regularly in Sunday School? Is it their fault? Or is it that we parents find other things to do - we take a trip, we sleep in late, we have friends over and so we are too busy to attend Sunday School regularly. What do you think our children are learning from that? Have we come to the conclusion that Christian Education of our children is no longer important, or have we simply let other things interfere? And how about our young people? Why is it many of our youth

are not a part of the program of the church? What other things could possibly be more important? Now, I know young people. They will complain. They will say they don't like the teacher. They will say the material is not good. They will say they are bored and are not learning anything. But kids are like that. And let me ask this, where else will they get anything like Christian education and Christian training? If you don't insist that they participate in what the church has to offer, are you providing something better as a substitute?

One of the most important responsibilities we parents have is to lead our children to Jesus. When Andrew heard Jesus preach, the first thing he did was to go looking for his brother. He found Peter and told him that he believed Jesus was the Messiah. Then, the Bible says this, "First he findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, we have found the Messiah...and brought him to Jesus." Do you remember the story of Noah of the Flood and the ark? The Bible tells us that he preached 120 years and in all that time he had only seven converts. But do you know who those converts were? They were his own family. When Noah got to heaven he could look around and see all of his children there. I wonder this morning if all of us will be able to do that? And how are you going to feel and how are you going to explain it to God if some of your own family is missing? I tell you, when we keep our children out of Sunday School, when we permit our youth to miss church and youth group, we are preaching them a sermon they won't soon forget. When we get to heaven and look around, if some of our children are missing, we will wish we had done differently, but it will be too late.

When we have time for bridge and golf and the country club and social activities, when our bar bill at the club is larger than our pledge to the church, when children see their grandparents wearing clothes that cost more than they give to the church in a year, we are telling those children an awful lot. And maybe you think because your children are raised, it doesn't matter any more. But the most important male figure in my young life was my grandfather. What he did had a tremendous influence on me. To this day I can see him, when he was old and crippled, walking to church with his cane because he thought it was important. To this day I can see him and my grandmother kneeling down on the hard floor when the preacher prayed. And I am certain in my own heart that a great deal of the credit goes to him for the fact that I am in the ministry today. Yes, you are still having an impact on the lives of those you love.

To bring your own family to Jesus is not easy. Someone has said that "The place where the reality of a man's religion is tested the most is in his own home." That is certainly true. Pierre Loti tells us in his autobiography how, as a small boy, he aspired to become a saint. In his young boy's heart he resolved to copy Simon Stylities who lived atop a stone pillar for forty years and won for himself a great reputation for piety and sanctity. Young Pierre mounted a stool in the kitchen and announced his plan to remain there for forty years. His mother took a rather dim view of his religious aspirations and would have none of it. An hour after his career as a saint had started it came to an end and he recorded in his diary, "This I discovered that it is exceedingly difficult to be a saint while living with your own family."

Well, that is certainly true. Yet, I suspect that is where Jesus wants us to begin. Do you remember the story in the Bible of Jesus healing the man named Legion who had many demons? When the man was healed and seated at the feet of Jesus - and as the Bible puts it - in his right mind, he told Jesus that he wanted to go with him as his disciple. But do you remember what Jesus said to him? He said, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." Yes, go home...the first place Jesus calls us to share our faith is in our own families. And when I stand before God on judgment day, of all the people I have shared Jesus with in my ministry, I would rather look around and see the members of my own family there.

Are you providing a home where there is such a spiritual atmosphere that your family is seeing the face of Jesus in your life? The great Rufus Jones wrote of his home, "I am most of all thankful for my birthplace and early nurture in the warm atmosphere of a spiritually-minded home...I never can be grateful enough for what was done for me by my progenitors before I came on the scene. They provided the spiritual atmosphere of my youth. I became heir of a vast, invisible inheritance. There is nothing I would exchange for that." So I want to say to you young people and you young couples, do not expect your home to suddenly become Christian when a child is born. You must begin now to lay the foundations that your children may become heir of a vast, invisible, spiritual inheritance.

I hear many disturbing things about our youth today. The crime rate for those under 18 is spiraling and right here in our own city the papers are filled with the crimes of juveniles. Our youth do not so much need better food or clothing, better education or recreation. They do not need so much better cars, better times, bigger allowances. No, they need better parents and they need better homes. They need homes where God is the head of the house, where Jesus is loved, served, worshipped and obeyed. They need homes with integrity, morality, honesty and industry because the world never got a Christ or anyone Christlike except through a holy family.

In our scripture for this morning we read the story of the family from which Samuel came. Samuel is a sort of watershed in the Old Testament. He is truly one of the great figures of Jewish history. He has been called the last of the judges, the first of the prophets, and the maker of kings. The Bible tells us what sort of home produced this great, spiritual giant. It was a godly home, a home where Samuel himself was the answer to prayer. A home where he was dedicated to God from the beginning. It was a family committed to the Lord. As his mother put it when Samuel was born, "Therefore have I lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives he is lent to the Lord." And when God gets a loaner like that, he can do great things for his people! Is your home producing "loaners" for God? What our city, our world, our church needs are parents who are making Godly homes where children are on loan to the Lord. No, the world never got a Christ, or anyone Christlike, except through a Holy family.

Let me share a story with you. You may think it is sort of "cornball" and maybe it is. But I want to share it because it is a true story and illustrates a truth about life and about families. Back in the early years of our country five young men set out from the same town in Western Penn. for the great northwest. Some years later when they returned home, four of them were tremendously changed. They were pitiful examples of hard and wild and undisciplined life of the frontier when a life has no resistance to evils and temptations of men. But the fifth came back spiritually mature and strong. When asked to explain it, he said it was the picture he carried in his heart. And what was the picture? It was the picture of his last breakfast at home. As always his father got out the Bible, but his eyes filled with tears as he tried to read, knowing that the ties of home and family would never be the same again as their son left home. The mother took the Bible from his hand and read. Then, as always, the family knelt to pray and the father began. His voice choked up and the mother took up the prayer, "we thank thee for our son and that we are able to send him out into the world pure and clean. May his feet never stray from the path of virtue and purity and truth." "It was this picture," said the young man, "that I carried in my heart. The vision of a godly home and a precious prayer. In those years in the northwest I could not bear the thought of breaking the heart of my father and mother, nor of dishonoring my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, whom they had taught me to love."

Yes, Samuel was on loan to God - and God could use him powerfully. How about your family - do you have any loaners God could use?