

## Something Old, Something New, Something Given, Something True

Matthew 13:52

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The old saying goes: “You can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family.” In terms of a faith community, you can choose your church or synagogue or mosque, but you can’t choose who exactly else shows up, or is already there! “You can choose your friends, but you can’t choose all the members of your faith family.” So here we are together invited to this table, with many others we’re glad to dine with, but, if the truth is told, there might be one or two or twenty that we would trade to First Baptist for a select twenty of theirs, or to First Methodist, or to St. Anthony’s Catholic, etc. Not really! Nobody is trading anybody! But you get the picture: “You can choose your friends, but you can’t choose all the members of your faith family – or trade for them!” – or members of the church staff, for that matter. So what are we to do, gathered around this table which belongs to God and is hosted by Jesus? What are we to do with at least a few we did not choose and at least a few who did not choose us?

Let’s remember, first, that whether we would choose others for the same faith community or whether others would choose us is immaterial. It doesn’t matter. What matters is that God in Jesus “does the choosing” from a holy spirit of graciousness. Not a single element of your or my personal discriminating tastes can qualify or veto God’s holy spirit of graciousness. Period. End of the question.

When the Scriptures are opened and read, studied and contemplated and pondered, Jesus says it is like when a householder opens a chest or a locked-safe of treasures. The householder takes out elements which are old, and elements which are newer. Swiss Protestant Bible and Theology Professor Karl Barth in the 20<sup>th</sup> century talked about how, in life, disciples are called by Jesus daily to carry the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Prof. Barth meant that discipleship in any time period includes the “old Word of ancient Scriptures” and the present day situations which are addressed from God’s Word, with relevance to situations in the world where we are today. We then evaluate current life situations in light of the older Faith Community Scriptures which we read, study, and ponder. Discipleship following Jesus includes receiving holy clues from ancient Scripture for current situations.

A tradition – mostly from England – among women being married encourages brides to carry: (1) something old, representing continuity; (2) something new, anticipating the future with optimism; (3) something borrowed, symbolizing happiness received; and (4) something blue, symbolizing “true blue” faithfulness; and (5) “a sixpence in your shoe” hoping for good fortune and prosperity. What if we amended the tradition as a community of faith – for the purpose of corresponding with Scripture and this saying of Jesus – to say? (1) “We meet here with something old (which is Scripture and tradition). (2) We meet here with something new (which are situations changing a bit every day). (3) We meet here with something given (which is God’s unearnable and undeserved love). (4) We meet here with something true, which is “God-with-us” creating Life-made-new no matter what the difficulties we face, whether of our own making or just slapping us down through nothing we did to precipitate the adverse situation whatsoever.

We are here to worship and celebrate at this table belonging only to God and hosted by Jesus Christ. Sometimes as a faith community, or as multiple faith communities, it’s great to be together, like when families mostly enjoy the company of their extended family; but sometimes it’s much more tense and difficult, because we are different from each other.

Country singer James McMurtry has recently released a song called “State of the Union.”

My brother's a fascist, lives in Palacios, fishes the pier every night.

He holsters his Glock in a double retention; he smokes while he waits for a bite.

He don't like the Muslims; he don't like the Jews; He don't like the Blacks; and he don't trust the news.

He hates the Hispanics and alternative views. He'll tell you it's tough to be white.

My sister's a Christian. She likes to go fishin'. She don't mind my brother at all.  
He puts her on redfish and flounder and trout, and they tear up the flats in the fall.  
She gets back to Dallas all sun burnt and sour, worn out from slinging plugs hour after hour.  
Seeing spots when she closes her eyes in the shower, she don't see a conflict at all.

It's the state of the union I guess. It's always been iffy at best.  
We're all in the family: the cursed and the blessed. It's the state of the union I guess...

Mother turned eighty, consummate lady; we took her to Golden Corral,  
'Cause she likes the Yeast Rolls and Bourbon Street Chicken. We oughta known better by now;  
'Cause me and my brother got into it good. I called him a hick, and he called me a hood.  
He said, "Dad always treated his Mexicans good. I guess you think you're better somehow.  
"Yeah, you think you're better, cardigan sweater, snowflake if ever there was."  
"You think you're so cool 'cause you did good in school; you got whipped every day on the bus."  
Sister let out for the shop and got worse – went to Wednesday night prayer at the new Christian church.  
With a cross on her neck and "a nine" [millimeter] in her purse, she might be the wisest of us!

It's the state of the union I guess. We're all in a ~~hell-of-a~~ [sorry ol'] mess.  
We're all in the family, the cursed and the blessed. It's the state of the union I guess.

It's the state of the union I say. Christmas dinner ~~might be hell to pay~~ [will have no hooray]!  
So how 'bout them Cowboys, and have a blessed day. It's the state of the union I say.

It's the state of the union I guess. It's always been iffy at best.  
We'll do all we're able with what we got left – It's the state of the union I guess.

You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family – or the members of your faith community family! God's done all that choosin' – graciously, and you're included. We are here gathered: with something old – like Scripture; with something new – like our life situations; with something given – like God's love; and with something true – like God-with-us creating Life-made-new.

In James McMurtry's song, the family members at least give each other a chance to go forward with a bit of respectful space among them – and that gives all of them together a chance to go forward. The world can't abide Fascism, racism, exclusivism, nationalism, or triumphalism; but the open graciousness of God in Jesus Christ reminds us that we are sitting to dine and departing to serve from a table and community hosted by Jesus which authentically will always be more transforming and sustaining than our individual homes and Golden Corral can ever offer on their own. If the state of James McMurtry's family has him thinking that they "can do all they're able with what they've got left," then surely as Jesus Christ calls us "family" – with others – and hosts us all from this table, the state of our union together and with others in God's world – by what is old, new, given, and true – prepares us and nourishes us to do all we're able from what we gain here. Don't you think?

– All honor and praise be to God.