

shamed, embarrassed, abandoned, misunderstood, falsely accused, suffocated, tortured, and even killed. He knows what it is to be lonely. His friends abandoned him when he needed them most; had he lived today, every last Twitter follower and Facebook friend would have un-friended him when he turned thirty-three – he who will never un-friend us.”

And so, when we find ourselves in our need beyond our own ability to sort out, we don’t turn to God with fear and trembling, or approach God as a distant power that needs to be convinced. We simply turn to our elder brother – who has been there – who knows what it’s like – who will come into the mess with us and help us.

Now, the point of this sermon series is that our relationships with Jesus actually impact our other human relationships and helps them to flourish. So how does knowing Jesus as our elder brother accomplish that? How does Jesus’ brotherliness make me a better sibling, a better friend, a better human being? And the answer is that Jesus makes us part of his family’s business.

In whatever circumstances you find yourself – in whatever family dynamics you are dealing with, we too are to follow Jesus into the distant land to be a good elder brother. We are to join him in the work of reconciliation and salvation.

If I can pull the first line of the next chapter from Hebrews into the mix here this morning, it says, “Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus.”

In other words, we’re brothers and sisters given a heavenly calling. Never forget that. We’re in the family business – royal manners! But this high calling can be accomplished in one way and one way only – by keeping Jesus ever before us. Because

there is no other model that comes anywhere close to being as powerful and as necessary.

Scottish pastor Robert Murray McChesney once said, “For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ.” John Newton said that a single view of Christ “will do you more good than poring over your own wounds for a month.”

Family relationships are hard. As I said at the beginning many of us carry deep wounds from our brothers and sisters who do not understand the God given vocation of the family. Sometimes we have been the source of pain in our family.

But because of Jesus at work in our lives, we no longer have the option to carry on treating our families as vehicles to get what we want. We must treat them as God’s tool to get what he wants.

We tend to look within ourselves to answer the greatest questions of the soul, “Am I right with God?” But to truly answer this question we must not look inward (am I good enough) but look to Jesus our brother who has done the “good enough” for us.

And rooted in this vision that we belong to a family where forgiveness and love are central, we are transformed into a different kind of sibling in a different kind of family.

We are set on a mission, keeping our eyes on him who knows what it’s like and can show us the way through.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

## ***“Made for it: Siblings”***

*November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023 — Selby United Church — Scripture: Hebrews 2:5-18*  
*By Rev. Mike Putnam*

**W**hen you think of a brother what do you think of? Do you think of a caring and supportive member of your family? Or do you think of someone who was always a real pain and still is? Or maybe you think of someone who isn’t a blood relative, but who is always there for you and someone you’ve shared some profound experiences with.

A brother: a role model or a bully, a friend or a foil, a conspirator or a tattletale. There’s no universal experience of a sibling – it depends on the kind of family you grew up in and the personalities involved.

Sibling relationships are so often complicated ones. For some they are the most life-giving relationship you have, for others, siblings are the people they most admire and desire to spend time with, for others time with siblings is downright painful.

This week I was trying to think of a movie about a good brother – a warm fuzzy kind that shows an elder brother looking after the younger one. I couldn’t think of one.

All I could think of was the brother from Home Alone. I’m not sure if you remember Buzz and Kevin. But let’s watch just a little clip to remember how they related: (Video Clip – Kevin and Buzz fight over pizza)

And it is that little unhappy exchange that sets in motion the chaos that would result in Kevin being left behind – Home Alone.

Have you ever seen brothers who behave like that? Buzz is cruel, selfish, greedy, and unsympathetic. Kevin is

immature and annoying. But what you going to do? That’s brothers for you!

And so, with this kind of brotherly relationship in mind it’s odd that this morning we are told that Jesus is our brother. What are we to make of this? How is this image of our relationship with Christ helpful? And ultimately, how does the image of Jesus as our brother change our own sibling relationships for the better?

Well, Jesus is called our brother in a number of places in the New Testament, but nowhere is it better explained than in Hebrews chapter 2. The author of Hebrews clearly explains the function of Christ as our elder brother, the necessity of Christ as our brother, and the benefits of Christ as our brother. That’s right! It’s going to be a three-point sermon!

But first, we must recognize that when Jesus is called our brother, or friend, or our spouse, it’s not to simply adopt these human relationships as they are. Because Christ came not only to share in our humanity but to transform it. He came to do his Father’s greatest work – Jesus is working in the family business.

And so, these intimate titles that get applied to Jesus help us to see that God is not some foreign force or impersonal power out there somewhere, but God is first and foremost all about relationship. This is what we’re made for. We are made for a relationship so deep and profound that it changes us to our core. But not just any kind of relationship, but a family kind.

And so, by calling himself our brother, Jesus redefines our other family relationships. Think back to the story where Jesus is teaching, and his mother and

brothers come to collect him fearing he's making a fool of himself. But when they do, Jesus redefines his family in that moment saying, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

And so, at the centre of what it means to follow Jesus is to find yourself in this new family. That's why we call one another our brothers and our sisters. Not because we have been through some tough stuff together and now, we feel a deep bond, but because Jesus makes those of us who are unrelated, related.

So, first, what's the function of Jesus as our elder brother? Well, Hebrews says, "Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters."

Jesus' function is to make us holy – to make us acceptable in the eyes of God. How does he do that? He does it by taking on the traditional role of the elder brother. But in a world where Buzz McAlister is our model for elder brothers, that traditional role needs some explanation.

Do you remember the parable that Jesus told about the Prodigal Son? Well, it's actually a story of two brothers, not just the prodigal one. There's the brother who lives wastefully and imprudently but there's also a brother who tries to live righteously and faithfully. But interestingly Jesus depicts both as failing in their family roles.

The younger brother is obviously a train wreck – there's no question about him. But Jesus is no happier with the elder brother because he has failed to live up to his family role.

You see, in traditional cultures the elder brother has the most to gain from the father dividing up the inheritance. Elder

brothers received a double portion because of their role. Why? Because their role was essential to the family unit. Their job was to keep the family together – to sort out the other siblings when they need sorting out.

But in Jesus' parable the elder brother didn't do that. He didn't play his role. He didn't go after the younger brother and sort him out. He just went on living self-righteously.

But Jesus isn't like that elder brother. Jesus, through his incarnation (his coming to earth as a person), has gone after his Father's children in the far country - seeking after his lost and wayward siblings – which is us!

Sinclair Ferguson, a Scottish preacher, loves to tell the story of an occasion when the royals, Elizabeth and Margaret were still young women. The sisters were going out to a social function, one of their first as official members of the royal family. But before they left the palace, the Queen Mother said to them, "Remember girls, royal manners, conduct yourselves as princesses."

But the Queen Mother might well have said to Elizabeth, it's your job to ensure that your younger sister behaves in a manner worthy of a member of the royal family. And that's the role God the Father has given Jesus the Son.

The Bible teaches that people mature in their faith only when they know down to their bones that they are accepted and safe in their relationship with God. And it's with this foundational knowledge, upon which their relationship with God and with one another can grow.

And so, our salvation (God's saving act to make us his family) is the soil out of which God begins our transformation into the people who will one day inhabit heaven. And it's our adoption into the family of God

that gives us this assurance. No matter our failures – no matter how we mess things up we're still in the family. But we might well expect our elder brother to sort us out from time to time.

Okay, so that's the function of Jesus as our elder brother. But why is this necessary? Why did God do it this way? Why couldn't God have accomplished his salvation work a different way?

Hebrews says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death...". In other words, it needed to be a human to deal with the human problem of sin and death. But not just any human...

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, "For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming..." (1 Corinthians 15:21).

What Paul is saying is that there needs to be an unwinding of the power of sin on a human level. Picture a battery that is fully charged. How do you get the power out of the battery? It needs to be used up or spent. That energy needs to be drained – or consumed somehow and that's what Jesus did on the cross – he drained the power of sin and death.

Now, we're talking about something that is far above our paygrade here. It's okay if this is all a bit fuzzy. We can only speak of this in the most abstract ways. This is a power that is not of this realm, yet we can see it, and experience it and battle against it. But ultimately, it's beyond us to deal with.

And that's why Jesus was the only one capable of dealing with it – that's why Jesus being our elder brother was so necessary. Jesus, in his two natures, human and divine, was the only one capable of draining the power of human sin and sorting out the consequences.

And because of what Jesus has done, to drain sin and death of its power, we now have a brother who, in our sorrows and discouragements, in our pain and our failures never lobs down a pep talk from heaven, but he comes to us, with the full power of God, to do for us what you cannot do for yourself.

Okay, so that's the necessity of Christ as our brother. Now let's get to the best part. What's the benefit of our elder brother. Hebrews says, "For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who were being tempted."

The nature of a good elder brother is one who is part of the family and is there through it all. But even more than that, he is one who has experienced what you have experienced. So, when you mess up or are at your wit's end, he doesn't look down on you with annoyance but with empathy. He knows what it's like because he has experienced it too.

Author and pastor Dane Ortlund says, "Jesus is not Zeus. He was a sinless man, not a sinless Superman. He woke up with bed head. He had pimples at thirteen. He never would have appeared on the cover of Men's Health. He came as a normal man to normal men. He knows what it is to be thirsty, hungry, despised, rejected, scorned,