

Let's pray. Creator of the Universe, bless our speaking and listening. Open our mouths and ears to your wisdom. In all your names, amen.

When I was growing up, my mother taught me not to talk about certain things at parties and neighborhood gatherings; some words were loaded and it was best not to mention them. At that time, they were words like, "divorce," and "VietNam," and "feminism." These days, it's Twitter and Facebook where you can't mention certain words unless you want to stir up trouble, and the words are words like "Second Amendment," "collusion," and "family values."

"Family" has become a loaded word, and for good reasons. Within the LGBTQ community, it has always been a difficult concept for many individuals. Some people have been rejected by their families of origin, or accepted only inasmuch as they conceal their LGBTQ identity—don't mention a same-sex partner, or don't bring them to family—there's that word!—functions—stay in the closet around extended family, who just don't understand. Some LGBTQ people have created families—a family of choice, a family of love—when their biological family could not accept them. Some LGBTQ couples have adopted children, or adopted their partners' birth children—another family of choice.

Outside the LGBTQ community, too, families are often difficult. We all know of strained relationships within families that have nothing to do with LGBTQ relationships—abusive parents, siblings who abandon each other, grandparents who favored one grandchild over the others.

None of this pain reflects "family values." Of course, the term "family values" is itself loaded, isn't it? It's a coded language for heterosexual, married couples with 2.5 kids, preferably middle-class, stay-at-home mom, never-divorced and the marriage came before the kids, right? Some 1950's never-really-existed vision of Utopia. Isn't that really what most people mean when they say they believe in family values? Or do they mean families taking care of each other, opening up to take in new members as their children fall in love and marry—whoever they fall in love with? Or bring home friends who can't go home for the holidays for some reason. I know we always had friends of my sisters staying with us for the holidays; and when I had a home of my own, Arthur and I welcomed people who couldn't

get home to family to our holiday dinners—soldiers both US and German. We are still friends with some of them.

Families are in the news for another reason just now—the forced separation of families seeking asylum at the US border. These are families who have come here legally, fleeing terrible conditions in their homelands—why would anyone leave their own country without drastic need?—hoping to find shelter. They have the paperwork. AND then they are separated from their children, including toddlers and infants, who are sometimes placed in foster care, and sometimes placed in detention centers—we’ve seen the pictures on the news. The physical and psychological harm—trauma—to these children is indefensible, inhuman, and unChristian. These are “family values?” Even if a person believes the families should not be here, how can they defend this treatment?

Families. Jesus asked “Who is in my family?” This reading is often interpreted as a rejection of families of origin—that the “true Christian”—whatever that means—should be prepared to leave their family behind in order to completely devote themselves to Jesus. But that’s not what he says, and of course, we see his family involved in his ministry in many ways later on—his mother Mary, and his brother James both were part of the early church. He’s pointing out that it’s not just blood, or biological ties that make a family. Just as we in the LGBTQ community often create our own families out of necessity, we can add to our families out of love. How many of us are honorary “aunts” or “uncles” though we don’t have a blood tie to a child? I know I am, to several kiddos—one of the benefits of being a pastor. Or siblings—or cousins—that useful catch-all relationship.

What makes a family, then? Because we’ve just established it isn’t biology—or it isn’t only biology. Blood family members can and do wreak havoc in each other's lives; non-blood family members can and do look out for each other. Think for a moment. You’re in a situation—the details don’t matter—and you need to call someone at 3 am to help you. How many people do you have in your life who you could call who would come at once, no questions asked? That’s your family, blood ties or no. That commitment to love and care and lift up, to be there and have your back. Now—if they called you at 3 am, and needed your help, would you go at once? You need to be able to say, “yes,” without hesitation, because that street runs both ways, doesn’t it? And it doesn’t mean the one doing the helping out at 3 am

won't be giving you a ration of stuff—that's part of family, too, knowing when to give you a scolding in love.

Family values. Family values are love, unconditional love, even when we don't quite understand; acceptance; a welcome to those who need a place to go, a new family, a temporary family, maybe; sometimes a wake-up call, some tough love—but always love. A widening circle, not a closed circle that says, "you are not part of us, you are not worthy, go away." Family welcomes. Family loves.

In the midst of this Pride month, this celebration of our larger Pride community, we remember the roots of our celebration—a protest march, demanding civil rights. We are not there yet. Yes, we can marry our same sex partners, but when our rights in housing, in employment, in medical care, in adoption, and in other ways can be denied, we are not there yet. Because unless all of us in this LGBTQ family have the safety and assurance of those rights, none of us can be sure we really do. Remember the roots of our parade; never give that up. Those drag queens and transwomen and butch lesbians and Bi women and flamboyant gay men—they got that protest going and the parade/protest march the next year. They were the family of voices speaking up and speaking out.

Our LGBTQ family values, our Pride family values, are inclusion, love for and championing one another, making space for all, and refusing to allow anyone to be shut out. Our family circle is drawn wide. We remember those who have gone before, those are with us now, and those who will come after.

"Who is in my family?" Jesus asked. The answer is, "Anyone who needs a family." In all God's many names, amen.