

## **Family Matters**

**Let's listen together to a Biblical vision of the inclusive community**

**Mark 3:31-35**

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*Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."*

*"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."*

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All around us, we see lines drawn to exclude:

- property lines, that separate what's "mine" from what's "yours";
- national borders that separate "us" from "them";
- the "color line" that some realtors draw around upper-income neighborhoods to exclude certain people;
- blood lines that in many cultural contexts separate humanity into categories that determine profession, income, and marriage partners.

During these years, Ruth and I have worked primarily among indigenous people in Peru who have an understanding of community quite different from North American concepts. Among the Quechua-speaking peoples of the Andes Mountains of Peru, it is considered presumptuous or brash for a young person to speak often of "I" or "me". The belief in the high Andes Mountains of South America is that speaking in the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural—"we"—is more honest, because our every thought and word is conditioned by the rich tapestry of human interaction in which we were raised. "What do you know that you have not been given to know by God, your community, and the ancestors?", Quechua-speaking mothers ask their children. The way *you* think and speak informs how *I* think and speak, and that goes for the community we see around us, to be sure, but also to the community of our ancestors, whom we only see in our dreams, but who taught us to think and to speak.

In fact, so sensitive is the Quechua ear to the nuances of community that, whereas the English language has only one word for the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural pronoun, "we", the Quechua-speaking people have two: *Noqaku* and *Noqanchik*. When Rose Emily, George and I tell Barbara Wirth, "We're going out for Mexican food, see you tonight, don't wait up!", that's *Noqaku*, the "just us", the exclusive "we". *Noqaku* creates a kind of community by drawing lines that exclude someone else.

*Noqanchik* is different. *Noqanchik* is the inclusive “we” (the divine “ya’ll come”) that welcomes all—speaker, listener, friend and foe. *Noqanchik* creates community by including everyone, everyone. *Noqanchik* erases the lines of exclusion and draws a circle that includes everyone. Interestingly enough, in the Quechua translation of the Bible, more than 90% of the time, it is *noqanchik* that is on the lips of Jesus. In the Quechua New Testament, the use of *noqanchik* reveals the radically inclusive community of God.

In first century Palestine, in a society organized along kinship lines, Jesus of Nazareth turned the concept on its head. In a moment, he broke through the boundaries of family (“in-group membership by birth”) and included the poor, the lame, the oppressed, loud and rambunctious children, “sinful” prostitutes, greedy, collaborationist tax collectors, the terrorist Zealots, and a host of others in God’s inclusive family. “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother”. In a moment, the Gospel Truth was revealed: God’s Realm is not a bounded-set carefully marked off by bloodlines, or race, or gender, or tribe, or income bracket, or the kind of car you drive, or even how politically correct you are. Salvation is not a bounded-set at all, according to our text, but rather the centered-set of all those who center their lives on doing God’s will: doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God, and all this by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

One of the primary tasks of the mission of Jesus Christ was to redraw the world, erasing the lines of exclusion and welcoming all into God’s joyful realm where you never know who you’ll end up sitting next to! (Take a look around if you don’t believe me!)

The work you sent me to do almost a decade ago was to work with the Joining Hands against Hunger Network in Peru, a joint effort of 15 Peruvian churches and community-based groups to identify and address the root causes of poverty and injustice in Peru’s poorest communities. Our Network has worked for the last 5 years with a group of mothers—fathers and teachers and many, many children, too—but mostly mothers, both Catholic and Protestant. A group of mothers who are redrawing the world they live in as they engage in the mission of Jesus Christ.

La Oroya is one of world’s most polluted places. 1000 tons of lead, arsenic, cadmium and SO<sub>2</sub> emitted each day. In a city with 11,000 children, 97.2% of children have lead poisoning. Impact on I.Q. Each year, each child can lose 1-3 I.Q. pts. No one has the right to take away from any child’s God-given intelligence. No one.

Yolanda – despite danger, she dares to be a mother to the 11,000 lead-poisoned children of La Oroya. Yolanda is not a biological mother. She has never borne children in the literal sense of the word. But because Yolanda has a mother’s hope that La Oroya can some day become a safe place for children, she is, in God’s radically inclusive “noqanchik”, mother to 11,000 children. And to mine. And to yours. And because Yolanda has dared to follow Christ to redraw the world to

include La Oroya's kids, you'd be amazed at what we together, *noqanchik*, have been able to accomplish as Peruvian Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals, NGOs, with the help of your mission support through the Presbyterian Church (USA):

- News of the on-going health crisis for children has been carried by more than 500 Peruvian and U.S. newspapers, CBS News, National Public Radio, and magazines from Mother Jones, to Vanity Fair, to Christianity Today. By stating publicly that the Company is not, in fact, complying with Peruvian environmental law and is, in fact, generating millions of dollars of profit each year, the media has begun to turn the tide of public opinion in La Oroya, Peru and the U.S.
- Last year, Peru's Supreme Court ruled that the Health Ministry must take action to reduce Doe Run's toxic pollution and care for the sick children;
- In June, an interfaith delegation came to the United States from Peru, sponsored by the Joining Hands Network—the Catholic Archbishop from La Oroya's region, the president of the National Council of Protestant Churches, and the leader of Peru's Jewish community—to invite Doe Run owner Mr. Ira Rennert to redirect some of his corporate profits into improving the health of La Oroya's children.
- In August, the Peruvian Government fined Doe Run \$243,000 for violating Peruvian environmental law and the Company has announced it is lowering emissions.

You see...Yolanda has responded to God's call to mission and has redrawn the lines that separate...into a circle that includes all. The media speaks of the "First World" and the "Third World" as if rich and poor inhabited separate planets. When you return from a mission trip, and your friends ask you about the poverty, you're tempted to say "You have no idea...it was like another world!" The temptation is to draw a line, to separate yourself from the unsettling reality that millions of children, tonight, will cry themselves to sleep simply because their mothers do not have enough to feed them.

But Jesus Christ invites us to join him in His mission to redraw the world, erasing the old lines that separate, transforming them into a circle that includes, that embraces. My life was forever changed when I learned from La Oroya's mothers a profound truth about this "redrawing of the world" that is mission. A pastoral team from our Joining Hands Against Hunger Network had gone to talk with a group of mothers in La Oroya's and to understand what help they needed to organize their community against the poisonous pollution. As the gravity of the situation dawned on us, as we realized the impact of the pervasive toxicity on La Oroya's children, one of our pastors looked at the rest of us and said, "Imagine if this happened to your children". One of the mothers was silent for a moment, and then said quietly, but firmly, "But, pastor, these are your children."

And La Oroya's kids are our kids. Because if the great commandment calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves, then we must love our neighbor's children even as we

love our own. “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of God”, the writer of the Epistle of James reminds us, “to visit orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world”.

This is the heart of mission—we step forward in faith, daring to radically include those whom the world sold out long ago. Daring to share our bread, our very homes with them, simply because we, too, have been cared for by God and by others. But in the context of a broken world of massive human need, most days, just the thought of being connected with millions of poor people is more than I can bear.

So let us hear God’s Good News: we’re not alone, we engage in God’s mission with everyone who does the will of God. With people who look, think and believe like we do, and many, many more who don’t. But who, like us, are centered on God’s heart for mission: to redraw the world, including everyone in God’s “noqanchik”, God’s inclusive “we”.

We’re far from out of the woods yet, but 11,000 children are living in a safer environment now, thanks to a group of mothers and fathers and teachers, who were supported by the prayers and financial support and advice and encouragement of 19 PCUSA congregations and some amazing short-term mission volunteers.

Larry and Inge Streshley, who this church supports, have worked in the DR Congo for 29 years—Larry each year leverages tens of millions of dollars in foreign aid to strengthen nutrition programs across the Congo, providing the critically important nutrition babies and children need for the bodies and minds to develop—so they can have a chance at the abundant life Jesus Christ promises us. Inge has introduced the protein-rich Moringa tree leaves into the kitchens of women in hundreds of Presbyterian Women’s circles across the capital city of Kinshasa and the women themselves have spread the good news of better nutrition and healthier babies across that city of 8 million people.

And alongside each of your mission workers, walks a team of colleagues like Yolanda who are daring to redraw the lines that exclude and impoverish into circles that include and bless in the name of Jesus Christ.

Some in our denomination are saying that, unless we agree on every point of theology as a Church, we can’t do mission together. But as Tom Gillespie of Princeton Seminary and an increasing number of Presbyterians are saying, “Our theological differences don’t invalidate Christ’s Great Commission”.

Story of Pastor David Pumacahua – A step towards God and neighbor.