

Welcome (3): Family

Scripture

Gen 12.1-3; Ex 19.4-6; Deu 4.32-35; Pss 68.5f; 113; Isa 44.1-5; Jer 31.33f; Eze 36.26-28; Mk 3.31-35; Act 2.39, 43-47; Rom 4.11f; 1 Cor 3.16; Gal 3.27-29; Eph 2.11-22; 1 Thess 4.9; 1 Jn 4.16-21; Rev 5.9f.

Graih

1): Kyle and Steph met in a bad boarding house and formed an unlikely relationship. He was not long out of care, fleeing the drugs and violence that threatened to drag him into a destructive world. She struggled with mental ill health. They were in their late teens and they were lost.

Kyle and Steph ran through accommodation at a dizzying rate. Out of rooms in a boarding house into a flat where they couldn't afford the heating; out of there back into a different boarding house until they got scared after someone was stabbed outside their room; out of there into another flat, then another, then another.

Almost every aspect of Kyle and Steph's life was chaotic. What possessions they had were strewn around their room or flat. They loved animals but struggled to look after the dog, cats, snake and turtles that they tried to keep. Steph occasionally found work as a cleaner but struggled to be consistent. Kyle had a chaotic relationship with the health services.

In many ways Kyle and Steph were children in adult bodies, trying to make their way in an adult world. They didn't have the most basic of living skills: how to cook, how to clean, how to manage bills. They were filled with exuberant excitement after a trip to the Wildlife Park. Kyle carried the ashes of his mother around with him. They lacked the capacity to make good decisions about their life.

There are not many services that have the flexibility to meet the chaos of lives like Kyle and Steph's. Even when they do the problems are vast and deep-rooted. Where to start? Kyle and Steph didn't need a programme or a set of appointments. What they needed were parents. What they needed was a family.

2): Everyone that Graih sees has a broken relationship with their family. Many have had horrific experiences of their family, leaving an ongoing wound of abuse and neglect that has blighted lives. Others yearn for a family of their own and a chance for things to be different. Jack fought his past of abuse, addiction and criminality to form a stable relationship and raise children. Even then he saw one daughter adopted and had a long struggle to keep another. Family exerts a powerful influence, for good or ill.

Family also offers a response that goes deeper than most to meeting the wounds of vulnerable people. Programmes, groups, courses and activities are all great but they become mired in their own piecemeal and shallow response to complex brokenness. Family is less about what you do as who you are. It goes to the root of identity. Where you belong. Where you live. The relationships you have.

Questions

1. What are your experiences of family, good and bad?
2. Throughout scripture God is calling and forming a people, a family, far more than individuals. In what way does this inform our view of the church?
3. In what ways is the church like a family, or like a programme of activities? How might it become a better family?
4. Is the 'family of God' comprised of Christians or everybody? If the former, what is our response and invitation to those 'outside'?

5. How should the church respond to lives like Kyle and Steph's?
6. How can we ensure that our sense of family identity is founded on Jesus rather than biology?

Ideas for further action

1. Practise inviting 'the outsider' to share some aspect of your family life.
2. Consider your role in the church family. A child? A parent? A sibling? A multitude of roles? Celebrate all of these and consider how the family relationships can be deepened.
3. Make space in your life to spend more time with your family.
4. Explore the work of groups such as The Children's Centre (www.thechildrenscentre.org.im), or the Children and Families Social Work Team (www.gov.im/categories/caring-and-support/children-and-families), to get a deeper insight into the situation of families on the island and how you might help.

Prayer

Father, thank you for the immense generosity of your love, which longs to call us all your sons and daughters. Thank you that we belong to a family where there is room for all.

Jesus, as the firstborn and head of our family teach us what it means to treat one another as beloved brothers and sisters. May we be known as your family by the love of our life together.

Spirit, heal the wounds caused by broken families. Bring hope to those longing for family. Shape us, your people, into a family of welcome and grace, to the glory of God.

Amen.