

What is the atmosphere in your home?

You have a choice to be a thermometer or a thermostat.

Sermon notes by the Rev. Arnold A. Bush, 6th Sunday of Easter, May 13, Mother's Day and Rogation Day, Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL 36078

Text: John 15: 9-17

Summary Sentence: In the Gospel Jesus mentions three attitudes or behaviors that can determine the atmosphere in the HOME. Here are three: JOY, FRIENDSHIP AND *AGAPE* (LOVE)

I. Introduction: Differences in atmosphere in homes

As a parish priest, I am able to visit a lot of homes and families. There are a variety of atmospheres. Also, when asking a person about their family of origin, they will describe various moods and atmospheres. Atmosphere is hard to define, but we know it when we experience it. My home was a place of lots of love, much fun, caring for one another, board games, practice of musical instruments, and lots of warm conversations around meals. These are some of the positive atmospheres, but there are negative ones too: stuffiness, too much competition, a lot of fussing and yelling, too many commands, being too critical, absentee father or mother, heavy drinking, TV always on loud, etc.

II. We have a choice to determine the atmosphere in our homes

As I stated in last week's sermon on the True Vine and the Branches, as we ABIDE/DWELL IN CHRIST AND HE IN US, we will bear much fruit. Our deep intimate relationship with Christ will affect our external behavior. Here is a modern illustration with a thermometer and a thermostat. A thermometer just reflects the temperature in a house, but a thermostat has power to change the temperature up or down. If you and I are just reflecting negative, hurtful, unhealthy attitudes, we act as a thermometer. But if we are experiencing deep dwelling of Christ internally, then we are more likely to be a thermostat changing the atmosphere around the home, work setting, office, or classroom.

We have all heard the phrase, "If Mama is unhappy, then no one in the household is happy." This has an element of truth, but if the boss, the owner, the CEO, the school principal, the classroom teacher, the supervisor is UNHAPPY, then everyone around them is unhappy. Thus, we can be enhancers of a positive atmosphere, or we can further deteriorate a negative atmosphere. Use a moment to examine yourself. Where am I helpful or hurtful? Now, let's look at three words in the Gospel.

III. JOY: Verse 11, *"I have told you to remain (abide) in me, so my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete (full, perfect)."*

A definition of JOY: To have joy does not depend on circumstance or environment. Joy transcends the negative circumstance or hurtful experience. Joy is not just being happy-go-lucky; it is something you know deep down you are experiencing.

Here is the meddling question for the preacher this morning. Am I fun to live with? Do I always have to win the argument or game? Am I dull? Some of us are overly RESPONSIBLE, i.e., cannot enjoy being playful or joking. I too critical, too pessimistic, too disrespectful, so that I

joke, laugh, have fun. In my early adult life I would sit on or suppress any fun activity. I must remain sophisticated as an Episcopal priest.

Some of us need a theology of "play." We cannot play board games or card games without being overly competitive. Some of you remember that bumper sticker that said, "A family that prays together stays together." This is true. But also, "A family that PLAYS together stays together." Our family plays with cards and board games. I recall asking a friend how is Billy today. "Oh, he will be depressed for two days because he lost in the card games we played last night."

"Let Christ dwell in you, so your joy may be complete." Can you sing the old gospel childhood song sincerely? "I got the joy of Jesus down in my heart... down in my heart."

IV. FRIENDSHIP: Verse 15, "I no longer call you servants, because the servant does not know his master's business. Instead I call you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

In this passage Jesus makes a distinction between Friends and Servants. As we reflect on family life, what might Jesus mean about Servants? A Servant does not understand or seek to know the will of the Master but simply obeys and completes the tasks. A servant is not in reciprocal relationship; ideas and information are not exchanged back and forth between the Master and Servant. The servant seems to be motivated more out of obeying and not enjoying the mutuality in relationships. Servants operate out of DUTY not respect for each other.

Friendship: In speaking about friendship with a mother, there can be several directions for friendship.

Let us hope any mother would develop a friendship with Christ. In some circles of Christians there is such an emphasis on "serving Christ, obeying what Christ wants, I am here to serve the Master, etc." The relationship with Jesus is one of such obedience and subservience that the mother does not relate to Jesus as a friend whom she enjoys being with. In our Tuesday Bible study group, we spend some time on developing FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS AND DEVELOPING A SERVANT ATTITUDE WITH JESUS. An insight I contributed to the discussion was that we must never lose the role of a servant to Christ, but some Christians see Christianity as all dutiful, always submitting to the Lord Christ and yet never knowing Jesus as friend. Yes, we can push the "friendship with Jesus" too far so that he is like a sister in a sorority or a brother in a fraternity.

Another aspect of friendship with the parent is the follower of Christ who relates to Jesus as a friend with whom you can talk about problems. The hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" states: "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!,,,O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!" (Supplemental Hymnal, page 88). Let us all daily remember we can carry all our frustrations and disappointments to God in prayer.

Another aspect of friendship is the development of friendships outside the family. Good marriages seem to have a good balance between activities and time within the family and activities and time outside the family. One giant role of the congregation is to have friendships with each other for singles and couples. If you were watching Dr. Phil on marriage he would have a lot to say on healthy marriages. But here is what I have found helpful doing marriage

counseling. See drawing of circles: 1. Two circles: Man and Woman dating and building trust and love. 2. Two Circles: Two circles overlap with $\frac{1}{4}$ overlapping. 3. Two Circles: Circles overlap $\frac{3}{4}$ of the time. Represents most of time with each other and little time for individual autonomy. 4. Two circles: Overlapping circles with one $\frac{1}{16}$ not overlapping. This may be smothering by the other spouse. This may be loss of identity and personal development outside of marriage relationship. Key is the balance to keep the individual and the marriage relationship healthy. Good healthy Christian friendships can encourage and give emotional and spiritual support in parenting and crisis events. For example, the Sowing Guild in St. Jude's, Arnold making hospital visitation during long and complicated surgery, and parents in peer groups dealing with tough parenting issues.

V. Love (Agape): Love one another as I have loved you.

No one has greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Agape love is what we have often received from our mothers.

Let's look at some definitions of *agape* love as contrasted with *eros* love.

Agape defined: The desire or motivation to meet the need of another without motivation of deriving benefit for self. It is caring with no strings attached, a quality of motivation.

Eros: It is a self-serving pattern of behavior such as reaching out to another person or object to meet our own needs. All of us have *eros*.

"Laying down our lives" may be something we cannot get our arms around in everyday life in Elmore County. Accept those who serve in the military or law enforcement. Few of you have an opportunity of lay down our life for another.

But let us think of *agape* as laying aside something of value in our life. One commentary (Westcott) said, "*Agape* is divesting oneself of a thing." When Jesus was taking time to stop eating at the Upper Room and taking off his outer garments and taking a towel in his hand, Jesus was divesting himself to meet the need of the disciples. Loving is being willing to surrender that which has value for your own life to enrich the life of another. A houseguest comes to Birmingham. As a couple you have had tickets to the Jimmy Buffet concert at BJCC. Your guest have never been to a Jimmy Buffet concert. You saw him at the beach last summer. So you say, we have arranged two tickets for you to enjoy this concert.

Here are some of the things we value: Certain clothes, a flat screen TV, a new car, special furniture, going to the Decorators' ShowHouse in Vestavia Hills. I noticed a swinging porch bed, some patio furniture, tickets to the Iron Bowl game and Super Bowl, drawing on a cruise to Australia and New Zealand. What values in your family would you lay down or divest from for someone else? For example, trips to San Francisco and England.

As we observe Mother's Day, here are some acts of *agape* mothers do for their children, not expecting anything in return: Meal preparation and serving, diaper changing, bed time reading and stories, attending functions at school and sports events.

Jesus says this is my new commandment: Love one another, do acts of kindness, acts of helping without concern and benefits to oneself.

Illustration: Here is an example of a mother raising 5 children before they were 12 years old. She divested herself of going to the movies, having long soaking baths, sleeping late in the

mornings, having others prepare her meals, and doing exercise several times a week. Instead here are a few of her accomplishments at age 50. She changed a minimum of 16,425 diapers; prepared 26,380 meals, said prayers with these five children 4,380 times, purchased 360 pairs of underwear, washed clothes 24,960 times, chauffeured them 1000s of miles to ball practice, piano, dance and chorus lessons. On the sports field she developed a profound vocabulary as all five children stood in the batter's box: "Good eye," "Swing level," "Wait for your pitch," "Way to watch." There are mothers of persons in this room who did the same thing. They were the thermostats that created expression of *agape* in their families. They were not perfect or without fault, but they were living into Jesus' New Commandment to practice loving each other.

Conclusion: Will you be more like a thermometer, just reflecting the atmosphere in the family? Or will you be a thermostat that changes the atmosphere in the family to positive and healthy behaviors?