

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Whole New Family Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, July 19, 2016
8:15 AM Mi 7:14-15, 18-20; **Mt 12:46-50** (And under that heavenly Father all people can be included, everyone a brother, everyone a sister and, oddly, everyone a mother, because it's the role of the mother to embody and to give birth.)

In the ancient world there were many families, as there are today, but they were big families. And big families often had more than one mother; especially if the father was wealthy he had more than one wife, and so one had a lot of half-brothers and half-sisters. And as families are important centers of identity, **the father was the principal source of identity because many half-brothers and half-sisters would have different mothers**, but they all had the same father. This is the background of this teaching.

Jesus was about something totally new and different. He was not about a new dynasty. He never married himself; he had no children. But he was very interested in creating a new family, not a family in the traditional sense, **where the relationships were of blood but where they were truly spiritual**, a spiritual family that went beyond the boundaries of traditional family, clan, and tribe to embrace the totality. **Jesus was always about embracing the totality.**

That's why no term used for him really works, for example **Messiah**. Well, we use the word Messiah in a way that fits because we have already altered its original meaning. **Prophet**, well you could say Jesus was a prophet in certain ways, but in many ways he wasn't. **Teacher**: well he taught, but he wasn't like the teachers of his day. Those categories don't fit him. **Zealot**: there are some who say he was a zealot. Well, but not like other zealots who were all separatists. They wanted to separate. They wanted the holy people of God to be independent of Rome and the gentile world. That wasn't Jesus. **Pharisee**: there are many serious historians and theologians that like to call Jesus a Pharisee. Well, in some respects he did honor the Torah, but as far as I

can tell only the written Torah, not the oral Torah that later became the Talmud. So in what way was he in any way typical of a Pharisee? Well, as far as I can see he wasn't.

Well, **here again is one of his extraordinary, unique positions.** His mother and his brothers, whoever they were, again in ancient families you don't know who anybody is really, it's just some kind of relative. All right, they are out there. And normally a man pays great respect to his mother, sometimes more than even to his father, because of the nature of those times. But on several occasions Jesus is not terribly respectful, and this is one of them. Your mother wants to speak with you with your brothers. **"And who is my mother?"** Well, that's a strange question, but from his viewpoint a necessary one because **he wants a new family, a new kind of family where everyone is related but there is only one Father and not an earthly one.** That's why he says, "Call no man father." Why? Because there is only one Father, the heavenly Father, the heavenly Abba, Daddy, literally. **And under that heavenly Father all people can be included, everyone a brother, everyone a sister and, oddly, everyone a mother, because it's the role of the mother to embody and to give birth.** And what are disciples called the do? To embody and give birth to this kingdom that Jesus preaches. So what might start out to sound like a certain sort of paradox turns out to be really a teaching of a whole new order of life and society in the making.