

Are Family Reunions Important?

As you read these lines, Mrs. Pope and I should be in Springfield, Illinois. Last Thursday, we celebrated our youngest child's twenty-second birthday in Waco then proceeded on to leave my mom in the hands of her siblings in Little Rock, while my wife and I extricated her parents from Missouri to Illinois. While in Springfield we shall be seeing the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum then on to Southern Illinois, a culture all its own – the culture in which my in-laws were reared. We are doing an augmented family reunion. A reunion in which we discover family history with the hosts from the previous generation. Often times I have taken my wife through the backwoods of East Texas to find the Popes or into the hills of Arkansas to trace my maternal roots. I have not, nor has my wife, seen all there is to see that remains of her parents' heritage. So this trip we may traverse in reverse the migration from Kentucky, to Illinois, to Indiana. As our kids marry and have their children, their ancestry, which is inclusive of the places where we'll be going, matter more to me.

Where do we come from? How did we get here? What are we doing here? And where do we go from here are important questions. We need to glean the wisdom of our ancestors and avoid the mistakes they made as well. My mind goes back to our family reunions, which were fun-filled days of playing with our cousins all day and into the evening. As we washed up for supper, I remember the smells; I remember the sights. Fried chicken, a barrel of iced tea and the cranking sound as homemade ice cream was being made. Sliced and diced peaches placed into one tub, strawberries in the other. I remember the sounds. The guitar, the banjo, the harmonica, the singing of ancient ballads and hymns. I loved to sit on the parameter of the men's circle as they talked of war, honor and the Bible. Although there were theological differences, as the evening wore on, there was more and more agreement on what really mattered. As my mind goes back to those days, I know I'll never see that circle again. The men who sat there are gone. Only those like myself who sat on the parameters are left. The sad thing is that much of that family history is now removed to the peripheral as well. Let's talk about three reasons family reunions are important.

1. To be reminded we are human.

We have won wars, but lost wars. We have our heroes and we have our men of infamy as well. A trip down memory lane will soon surface the truth that "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12).

It is good to learn the stories that Uncle John's marriage was gone until he found Jesus. You will hear kinfolk say, "Uncle John, I never knew you were like that." It is good to know that we can relate to flawed relatives, because we have all been flawed to some degree. I'm thinking about one uncle who fought in the D-Day invasion. As strong as he was, he was not strong enough to save himself. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). If you get close enough to anybody, the flaws will show up and this is good. It brings the capacity to invest our trust in the Lord. "I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (Psalms 91:2). "Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man" (Psalms 108:12). If we are anything it is because of Jesus!

2. To learn why we do what we do.

A lady in the community was known for her excellent beef roast. It was raved about and her family all enjoyed her cooking. One day one of her daughters asked, "Mom, I have watched you as you have prepared roasts for years. I believe I've got it down, but why do you cut off the ends of the roast just before you place it in the pan? She said, "Well, I don't really have a reason; that's just the way my mother did it." So the daughter went to her grandmother with the same question. Her grandmother threw her head back in laughter explaining that her pan was never large enough to hold the roast, so she just cut the ends off to make it fit, then put it in the pan. Now you may want to keep that tradition or you

may want to go ahead and cook the whole roast if you have lived beyond the great depression and can afford more than one pan.

The children of Israel were commanded to put stones up in remembrance of God's faithfulness to deliver and do so miraculously. The children were not to forget. That's why God said, "That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever" (Joshua 4:6,7). The story was rehearsed again and again. May we also tell our children of God's greatness again and again, until this next generation "gets it"!

3. To trace the hand of Providence.

Too often we live as though no one else came before us. We act as though no one else has done what we have done. Yet the Scripture says, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Loved ones that have gone on before us have blazed a trail. They have cut out the roughage, cleared the path and to a real extent, we stand on the shoulders of these giants. Many a time through the stories told, we see the unseen hand of our Lord leading each step of the way. The hand of Providence that brought my grandmothers to my grandfathers is the same hand that brought my parents and my wife's parents together and, of course, we see clearly that mighty hand brought us together as well!

Family reunions are a great time to tell each other and our kids how great God is and that there are no accidents. God led and guided us through all! "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way" (Psalms 37:23). "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy" (Psalms 107:2).

- Pastor Pope -

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