

“The Least of These”

Series: The Good News

Scripture: Deuteronomy 24:17-22 (NIV); Matthew 18:1-5;
19:13-15

Rev. Mary Bowman

March 15, 2026



Families are important.
They are not always easy . . . but they are important.
Families are the units that God created for us to live in.
Families help us understand our heritage.
Families forge our identities.

So we shouldn't wonder that researching one's genealogy has grown in popularity.
People want to know more about their families and more about their histories.

In fact, one of the most popular television shows on PBS is called *Finding Your Roots*.
In each episode, guests are presented with what is called a “book of life.” This “book of life” is a research summary of their biological family and it gives them a detailed look at their ancestral histories.¹

If we think for a minute, we will recognize that as Christians, we have our own “book of life.”
It is, of course, the Bible.
The Bible offers Christians a look at their spiritual genealogy, their spiritual heritage.

Like some of the guests on *Finding Our Roots*, we may be surprised at our spiritual heritage.
Our lesson this morning told us — not once — but twice: “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.”²

Now, it would be easy and understandable for a modern audience like us to skip over those phrases since none of us were slaves in Egypt.
But if we do skip over that part of the Scripture then we are disregarding our spiritual heritage.

Let me explain . . .
In the Old Testament passage, it sounds like God is speaking to all of the Israelites who had been slaves and reminding the slaves to remember their slavery.

¹ Wikipedia, “Finding Your Roots,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finding_Your_Roots.

² Deuteronomy 24:17-22 (NIV)

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But that is not actually the case . . . God is speaking to a different audience.
God is largely speaking to the offspring of those who knew slavery in Egypt.
How strange!

Why then is God asking the non-slave descendants to remember that they were slaves in Egypt?

It would seem that God wants each of them . . . and each of us . . . to remember that our spiritual heritage includes slavery.

Our spiritual heritage includes being foreigners and being slaves.

We draw our heritage from those who were once oppressed and vulnerable to the whims of rulers.

“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.”

I think God wants us to feel firsthand and remember both the mistreatment and the miraculous deliverance of God.

And I think God wants us to feel true empathy for anyone who is vulnerable and to be a part of their care and their redeeming.

As I said earlier, families are important.

And kinship really matters to God.

And God is our divine kin, our divine parent, our divine brother.

Amazingly, our identity is rooted in being the beloved children of God.

And God is sensitive to those who do not have the benefit of human kinship . . . the foreigner and the orphan and the widow and children.

Unlike the father referenced in our Scripture context,³ God will always acknowledge us and will never forsake any of God’s children.

³ The power of a Roman father over his children was absolute throughout their lifetime. When a child was born, it was placed before its father’s feet, and if the father stooped and picked it up that meant that the father acknowledged it and wished it to be kept. If the father turned and walked away, it meant that he refused to acknowledge it and the child could quite literally be thrown away. (William Barclay, *Ephesians*, 176.)

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As Christians, we are encouraged to see human beings as sisters and brothers in a family parented by God.

And like God, we are commanded to be sensitive to those who do not have the benefit of human kinship . . . the foreigner and the orphan and the widow and children.

In God’s instructions — “remember you were slaves” — God is both issuing a command and evoking our empathy.

God is asking us to remember times when we have felt vulnerable and were desperate for help, desperate for miraculous redeeming.

In our nation — considered the most prosperous in the world — there are an embarrassing number of vulnerable people.

Our government has pulled support and continues to pull support from the four vulnerable groups mentioned in our readings this morning.

We have lost kinship with those whom God has commanded us to help.

We need to reestablish our kinship.

There is a wonderful book about the power of radical kinship.

This book, called *Barking to the Choir*, was written by Greg Boyle, a Catholic priest who has worked for decades with gang members in the Los Angeles area.

Boyle’s approach to gang members is one of radical kinship and acceptance, Boyle has found that the love and grace of kinship are powerfully transformative.

Boyle’s goal is “to put a human face on each of the gang members and to usher in an abiding belief that we belong to each other.”⁴

Sadly, it is indeed too easy to dehumanize others, to deny them a human face, and to replace the face with judgment.

⁴ Greg Boyle, *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*, 8.

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When we think about gang members who are a type of orphan . . .
When we think about immigrants who are a type of foreigner . . .
When we think about single parent households who are a type of widow . . .
It is all too easy to judge instead of love.

In our New Testament reading, we are reminded of a God who values children. This same God who calls us God’s beloved children.

This God tells us that we must be like children to enter the kingdom of God.

Children do not judge.

Children accept the stranger.

Children love easily.

Children humbly respond to the vulnerable and what is different.

One of my favorite stories in Boyle’s book is about a gang member named Carlos.

Carlos came to America with his parents from El Salvador when he was two years old. He never learned to speak Spanish.

He was arrested as a gang member and he was deported back to El Salvador — a land he didn’t remember and a language he didn’t speak. He was a foreigner in his country of birth.

Carlos eventually made it back to the United States, but it was a harrowing journey with freezing nights and starving days. When he had made it all the way to Mexico, he was robbed and the robbers not only took his money but they also took every stitch of clothing he wore.

Carlos approached a nearby village — covering his nakedness with his hands — hiding behind trees and buildings. He was a foreigner with gang tattoos all over his body and yet the villagers began to approach him — each one offering him an item of clothing . . . underwear from one, a shirt from another, pants from another . . . until he was completely covered and he realized in a dramatic way that he had been clothed in kindness.

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He was clothed in kindness and it transformed his life. From then on, he vowed to be kind and he was true to his word. He looked out for a single mother and her child and many others. He helped to redeem them and he got transformed in the process.⁵

May we too remember we are kin and clothe others in kindness. Amen.

⁵ Greg Boyle, *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*, 168-169.