

**“Pentecost” – Rev. Jennifer Adams**  
**May 23, 2010**

I don't know how many of you out there watch the TV show Modern Family but it has quickly become my favorite show. Now I'm not a big TV watcher but I'm also not ashamed to say that this sitcom has my heart. It actually makes me laugh and cry almost every time and I find myself having conversations with people about it every week because there is always a lot to talk about in each episode. So while I rarely plug a television show from the pulpit (and this might actually be the first time ever, and possibly the last given the odds), I commend Modern Family to you. And I'm going to tell you a little more about it this morning.

This show is about just what it says it's about – an extended family working to be family in a time, and in a world in which family can be hard to pull off. Now within this particular family there are three branches, three “units” as we call them and the first unit is Claire and her husband, Phil and their three kids, high school Haley, middle school Alex, and 8 year old Luke. Claire (wife and mom) is a perfectionist who while obviously extremely well intentioned and often the one to help hold things together, often drives herself and everyone else just a little nuts with her desire to have everything just right. Phil, her husband, on the other hand loves just being a husband and father and prides himself on never, ever getting too stressed out over anything, which of course in his adamant position of non-stress, stresses out everyone else. High School-er Haley is dating a leather clad, guitar playing, long haired member of a rock band. Alex is incredibly smart and gets straight ‘As’ a fact of which she reminds her other siblings on a regular basis, and Luke seems to always have a not-yet-begun major school project due the very next morning. Maybe some of you can relate.

The second branch of this family is a gay couple whose names are Mitch and Cameron. Now Mitch is Claire's brother so that's how they connect to unit one. In the first episode Mitch and Cameron completed their adoption of Lilly, a baby girl from Korea. (And one of the shining moments in all of television was when Cameron introduced baby Lilly to the larger family while the Lion King's, “Circle of Life” played out loudly in the background. Great moment.) Anyway, Mitch is a lawyer who happens to be a little tightly wound with a quiet, yet focused intensity about him. While Cameron is large, dramatic, not afraid to use the word diva and has a professional history which includes a stint as a circus clown. You get the picture.

Finally, unit three of this Modern Family includes the father of Claire (from unit one) and Mitch (of unit two), this is 60-something, Patriarch Jay who (in his second marriage) is married to 30 or 40-something Gloria. Gloria is from Brazil, has a heavy Portuguese accent, a flair for fashion, a passion for life and a wise-beyond-his-years, poetic, deeply thoughtful 9-yr old son named Manny.

And this is the family. And the show is about how they are family. And one of the things you quickly become aware of is that within each of the three household there are challenges and there are struggles: There's the struggles of keeping up with the changes and needs of three very different kids . . .while being a perfectionist married to someone who refuses to ever be stressed-out ever over anything! There's the challenge of being an 8 year old boy with two older sisters

or a middle school girl who knows everything, except how to be a middle school girl. There are the struggles that come with being a gay couple, let alone just a couple with a new baby who have to balance drama and focus, quiet intensity and out-there-largeness at every turn. And there are the challenges of being a 60-something year old guy trying to relate to a beautifully, emotional 9 year old step-son who would rather discuss gently romantic visions of life than the latest stats from the NFL. In this family there are almost always cultures clashing and old hurts lurking and unknowns pushing everyone toward the edge, not to mention the ongoing presence of differences in genders, orientations, generations, ethnicities, interests, personalities and backgrounds.

And throwing all of that into one basket could lead to a complete disaster, yet the wonder of this show is that through their flaws and their differences and sometimes brilliantly because of their differences, this Modern Family finds a way to be family; their very genuine love for each other shines through in every show. And that's why I'm talking about them today, on Pentecost the day on which we celebrate the birthday of the church.

On that first Pentecost the Spirit came among the disciples who were huddled together in a house and the church became church -- not at the point at which everything settled down into predictable patterns -- that sentimental point has never really existed. We became church when the Spirit came blowing broadly with different languages and directions and gifts; when the Spirit blew open the windows and the doors and blew open the hearts and ears of them all; we became church when the disciples, in a diversity of languages were able to speak good news to their world, their modern world and the people out there were able to hear them. And from that point on, from the very birth of the church there have been cultures clashing and generations having at it; there have been break-offs and splinter groups and varieties of configurations and diversities of beliefs and practices of God's faithful people. Yet the challenge and invitation remain the same -- to come together with our differences around a common table -- to proclaim news that is truly good in ways that the world can hear it -- and to do the work that is love, letting it shine through us at every turn.

So, Church as Modern Family? Just the suggestion probably means that Church Fathers are now turning over in their graves. (Although our belief in resurrection probably eliminates that possibility altogether.) But doesn't church look something like patriarch meets 9yr old poet, meets high school girl, meets a variety of kinds of couples, meets perfectionists, meets immigrants, meets clowns, meets adopted children, meets modern adults and kids trying their best to be faithful, loving people with something greater than each of them holding them all together? And actually if you look at our family album, the album that is Scripture you'll find traditional and not-so-traditional-by-the-same-definitions-kinds of families, you'll find immigrants and teenagers searching for meaning; you'll find lawyers, 8 year olds, and patriarchs trying to tend the flock in the best ways they knew how. You'll find each of them and likely each of us too.

So, Happy Birthday Church, Modern Family that we are. May our struggles and our differences lead us into new understandings of one another, ourselves and our God. May our diversity inspire us to speak to the varieties of people out there who hunger for something like the good

news of Christ. May something greater than all of us hold us together even while we stretch in many different directions all at the same time. And most of all, as we have been commanded, may our love for one another shine through all of the shows into which we ourselves have been cast.