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July 31, 2022

## Dutch Bingo 1 Samuel 15 and Mark 6

Jackson's people have a name for this game. They call it Dutch Bingo. Like all games in his family, the rules are strictly enforced. Rule number 1: Only certain people can play the game. Rule number 2: If you are one of those people you get to play whenever you want in the presence of other people who can't play it. Rule number 3: The people who can't play the game don't complain about being left out. They smile and wait patiently for it to end no matter how long it takes.

We all know this game and we've all played it even if we aren't Dutch. It's the who-do-I-know-that-you-also-know game. For people in the little Dutch colonies of northwest Iowa, or perhaps of west central Michigan, everybody is related to everybody else if you just play Dutch Bingo long enough to identify your shared connections. But you know as well as I do that it's not just those little immigrant communities from the Netherlands. You can play the game if you're a Lutheran from Lake Wobegon or a Baptist from Dallas. Have you ever met an Episcopalian from Virginia? They are absolutely the worst. As for myself, it takes a great measure of self-restraint to keep from playing this game anytime I meet someone who went to Davidson College. Whenever I'm introduced to someone who went to Davidson in the company of other people who don't share our experience of the same small school, I have to remind myself that all these others don't give two licks who we know in common. It's rude to carry on a private conversation in a group setting that doesn't include everyone. Maybe for you it's a school. Or a camp you attended. Or another place you loved to go where the culture was thick and the people were intimately known. You can play the game with reference to any community where you belonged or any extended family that knew you by name. The game is always lovingly played with the heart-swell of recognition - somehow, we belong to each other. Your tribe is my tribe. It's the power of instant kinship that makes the game so irresistible to the insiders - and, yes, so unbearable to the outsiders.

Of course there are all sorts of advantages to kinship connections. I'm sure we can all think of occasions when the grace of recognition and the trust of belonging led us to some mutual benefit. Blessed be the ties that bind. But we've all seen it the other way, too. In politics the excesses are known as nepotism. In business and law we use the language of conflicted interests. In our communities we've learned to develop tests for equity and inclusion because our well worn habits of working with those known and trusted create barriers to difference and diversity. The ties that bind too often lock our neighbors out.

The familiarity of kinship so beclouds the judgment of Saul that the prophet Samuel accuses the king of a grave sin. The war narrative draws in stark relief the battle lines and the uniforms. In war if anywhere we should be able to tell who belongs to who and where one's

loyalties lie. But as Israel approaches the army of Amalek they encounter a clan known as the Kenites who have not yet chosen sides. They don't wish for a conflict with Israel's army but they have no other reason to turn on the Amalekites. As Finland is to Russia and Nato, the Kenites are pressured to choose sides in a conflict that now engulfs them. Against the advice of the prophet Samuel, King Saul accepts their plea and lets them go. At first glance it looks like an act of mercy. But it turns out the Kenites had family connections going back to Moses, whose father-in-law belonged to this tribe. Would Saul have been so gracious to others unable to drop the name of the great Hebrew deliverer? Saul's favor to the Kenites is part of a long tradition of kindness shown on the basis of kinship. The lexical association of kindness and kinship partly illustrates how we give favor to those having any basis of relationship to us. Kindness means literally to treat others as if they are our own.

Samuel's confrontation with Saul raises the convicting question to all of us of how we treat others not belonging to our own tribe of kinship and affection. In a potent example of disordered relationships, I've been reading recently the biography of John C. Calhoun, the slaveholding senator from South Carolina who was a primary cause of the Civil War. Calhoun's politics were rooted in the interests of landholding whites: kindness toward his own kind. But what's so interesting to me about Calhoun is what an incredibly short memory he had. Only two generations earlier, the Calhouns had been driven by religious persecution to treacherous immigration journeys. Calhoun's biographer, Robert Elder, says that the racist senator's ancestors had suffered from a "double disadvantage" as Presbyterians in Ireland. They were poor Irish people among the imperial English. And they were religious minorities in an Anglican country. They weren't allowed to hold office in Ireland and they were forced to pay tithes to a church they didn't attend. They fled Ireland after years of disquiet and dissent, grumbling with no sense of irony that life there had pinned on them the "badge of slavery." Irish Presbyterians like Calhoun immigrated to the English colonies in order to achieve freedom for their own kind. But they quickly lost the perspective of their experience. Moving steadily south along the Blue Ridge Mountains into the territory of South Carolina, they were perpetually embattled with Native Americans over lands they were seizing. And the rice plantations in the low country gave way to cotton plantations in the backcountry, in less than fifty years Calhoun's family became leading interests in the slave economy. Their circle of kinship extended only to their own family and race. Everyone outside that circle of kinship was either an enemy for the taking of land or a labor input to the economic system.

It's easy enough to perceive the seductive dangers of kinship. We flatter ourselves by giving affection to those who are like us; kindness toward others as a form of self-love. We can spot the sin in others - especially extreme cases like Calhoun - more readily than we can see it in ourselves. But too much love for our own kind is such a common disorder of our relationships. It's how we find ourselves in neighborhoods and churches full of people who look and think and act so much like ourselves. It's how we come to love the sound of our own voices on social media, and like the ideas that look like our own. It's how we find ourselves with so few

cross-ideological friendships; how we are surprised to find hostilities in ourselves to the differences we hear. We have too much love for our own kind. Twisted are the ties that bind.

The remarkable grace of the Gospel is that God's love for us is love for such a different kind. Jesus is God's body taking on a different form so that our humanity may be of one kind with God's divinity. God's love extends to all things that are different and enfolds all forms that are unlike. This divine love creates kinship across the boundaries of tribe, race, and family. It is love that transgresses the boundaries that we have established. To imitate this kind of selfless love for all kinds is what makes the message of Jesus so radical and so challenging. Paul's summation of the Gospel is unintelligible to communities that have grown accustomed to the distinctions between themselves. "There is no longer Jew nor Greek, no longer male nor female, no longer slave or free, for all are one in Christ Jesus." To show love without regard to one's own kind is the preposterous vocation of being Christian. It is a form of grace that we all fall short of achieving, and still it is a form of grace that we all receive in the love of God.

Baptism is the symbol of the kindredness of everyone. Water that blesses the humanity of all creation cannot be taken to make distinctions from the unity of Christ's body. This is water that welcomes everyone into the family of God's economy. To Samaya, we say as to everyone here, you are made in God's own image. So it doesn't matter who you know. Or who you don't know. It makes no difference whether you are well connected or completely left out of the game. You are already known by name in the Body of Christ. You are of one kind with Jesus Christ, so the kindness of God's grace extends to you.

Amen.