

Commissioner Tracey Tidd:

Good morning. Allow me to share a few words with you this morning. 40 years ago, Sister Sledge, who actually were four sisters was awarded the Grammy Award for best R&B performance by a duo or a group with vocals for the song. And yes, you've probably already guessed it, We Are Family. For some of you old enough, or maybe not old enough, but enjoy good music, "We are family, I got all my sisters with me. We are family, get up everybody and sing." This music I know right now is alive in your head and I apologize for that, but I need you to focus with me for just a few moments as we share together.

Well, over these last months, one of the greatest challenges for many people has been this separation for families, whether it's been our children living in other cities or in other locations, whether it's been our parents living at home or in a longterm care facility, whether it's a separation from our grandchildren or people who have just become part of our family, people are missing people. We are family and we need to be family. And we are family.

But beyond our families, we have been missing and being able to connect with people from our church family. Maybe initially many felt the relief of the quiet Sunday and not rushing around and out the door and trying to get kids ready. But we quickly have come to realize that we are missing being able to connect with our church family and we are missing each other. And we are family.

God's plan for us is to be family. In the opening chapter of John's gospel, we read this bold statement about why Jesus came to earth and how that impacts you and I. And allow me to read that verse, John chapter one, verse 12. "Yet to all who received him to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." God plans for us to be his children and make us one family, the family of God. Believing in his name is to trust Jesus completely. Trust that what he says is true and trust what he says that he will do is true as well. For he is the only hope of salvation.

He understands that for some trusting does not always come easy. The journey of our lives sometimes has meant that trust has been betrayed and we find it hard to trust. For some, the image of God, of this loving Father is hard to grasp at times. But he understands all of that. He has been watching and walking alongside through all the stories of our lives. And he has encouraged us to trust him. He has planned for us to be his children, and that's why he sent Jesus Christ so we could understand how much he loves us and that we can trust him. You see, as we trust him, we become his children and we become part of the family of God. We are the family.

Secondly, God has provided a prayer for his family. This is a well known prayer, often a prayer that we say at church on Sundays. And it is the Lord's Prayer. It is the family prayer as recorded for us in Matthew chapter six. When we say Our Father, two very important words said together, Our Father you see, God wants us to know that he is our father. And as our Father, we can come to him in prayer like children approaching their father. Allow me to share from Jesus-Now by Leslie Brandt entitled You Are His Children Now.

"As a little child boldly approaches his father in love and in a need, so God is your father. And you may confidently come to him worshipfully, penitently, joyfully, daring to air your doubts, your fears, your problems, and needs. Knowing that he hears, that he rejoices in the faith of his children and that he responds to their urgent requests. You must however, be open to God and your fellow beings. As you claim his divine forgiveness, so you are to relate in forgiving love to those around you. As you seek his gift, you are to share such gifts with your brothers and sisters. He rejoices in the love of his children."

Each time we pray the Lord's Prayer, let's be reminded that we are part of his family and that we pray the family prayer as we say, Our Father. God also modeled for us the priority of his family. And that priority is love. Jesus said to his disciples in his word, that all people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. Now we know that it's not always easy to love those people that God places in

our path or in our lives. And we also know that for some, it's not always easy to love the people we live with. And we know that relationships can be very complicated at times, but as a follower of Jesus Christ, we must choose love. You see, love is a choice that leads to an action. And God model's love as a choice that requires an action. And that is demonstrated for us in John chapter three, verse 16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The priority of God's family is the way of love. Loving others the way he loves us. First Corinthians chapter 13, a very familiar passage, the love chapter that we so often use at weddings helps us and reminds us what love looks like. The love that God calls us to live out as members of his family. We are family and I thank God that he has made it possible for us to be his children and to call him Father. I thank God for you and that as we pray Our Father, we are reminded once again this morning that we are family. We are family who have been loved and who love like we have been loved. So may God bless you as you embrace his love for yourself and love others as he has loved you.

Let me share with you this morning before we close words that have encouraged me in my own life as a child of God. Words I came across perhaps many years ago, written by Bruce Wilkinson in his devotional, based on the Prayer of Jabez. "Is there something you need, something you long for with all your heart? You can't make it, buy it, or find it anywhere else. Only your loving Father can bestow it upon you, his divine blessing. And his heart is overflowing right now with an intense desire to give it to you. Today, I want you to hear what God is saying to you. Allow God to rebuild himself once again to you today, as you wait before him in these moments. Remember who he is. He is your Father, giving, compassionate, faithful father. And what fills his heart right now is a deep longing to pour out his deep favor on your life."

So as we close, and as you share in your quiet space this morning, will you kneel before him and ask for his blessing as I pray with you this morning, as we close. Shall we pray? Father, you are our Father. And we thank you for your son, Jesus Christ, who has made it possible by his death for us to come to you and call you Father. Bless us, each one as your children that we might bless others. Father, you love us and we accept your command to love as we have been loved. And so hear our prayers this morning that we offer you in the name of Jesus. Amen. And amen. God bless and have a great day.