

The Family Stone (2005)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V- ; L- ; S/N-

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

James 4:11

Have you ever said the wrong thing to people whom you have just met, and then, as you try to correct yourself, you only make matters worse? That is Meredith Morton's (Sarah Jessica Parker) predicament in director/writer Thomas Bezucha's family comedy. Meredith is a high-powered New York professional who cannot refrain from answering her incessantly ringing cell phone. Engaged to Everett Stone (Dermot Mulroney) she has accompanied him to his family's picture-perfect New England home for the Christmas Holidays. It is just as well that she does not know that the one Stone who has already briefly met her, Amy (Rachel McAdams) passes on to the family her low opinion of her. Thus when, as soon as they arrive, Meredith makes her faux pas, most of the Stones take a dislike to her, all but the

tolerant Ben (Luke Wilson).

Poor Meredith becomes her own worse enemy as the days unfold, saying the wrong thing about son Thad Stone (Ty Giordano), who is both deaf and gay. Family matriarch Sybil (Diane Keaton) immediately believes that Meredith is the wrong choice for her son, and so refuses his privately made request to receive the promised ring from his grandmother to give to Meredith. A little into the plot we see why she refuses, she being motivated by a dark secret that at first only loyal husband Kelly (Craig T. Nelson) knows of, but which one by one, the others discover.

Give foot-in-her-mouth Meredith credit for at least hanging in there with the family, even though she feels compelled to move to a hotel, and calls for sister Julie (Claire Danes) to leave their family Christmas gathering and join her for moral support. Are you surprised that Julie is just the opposite of her sister, fitting in so well that she almost needs to apologize to her sibling?

The Stones semi-Bohemian lifestyle and values ("semi" in that their million dollar home is a far cry from garrets and walk-up flats) is the direct opposite of Meredith's austere, perfectionist nature. They claim to be tolerant—after all, they adore and accept both son Thad and his male lover Patrick (Brian White)—and yet as we see during the course of the story, their tolerance is reserved for those who are like themselves, their acceptance quickly withdrawn from someone like Meredith. How everything gets sorted out and "right" couplings replace "wrong" ones comes to a clashing conclusion by the end of the Holidays, and in the touching scene of the family quite some time later, reunited but with one member missing. Though not nearly as good as the other film so similar in plot, not as widely promoted, Junebug, this is a comedy with a touch of drama well worth spending some time with.

For Reflection/Discussion

1) What was your first impression of Meredith? As negative as Amy's report about her to her family? What has been your experience to live with such a perfectionist in the family or at work?

2) Have you experienced entering into a new family—or other close-knit group? Was it as difficult as the Stones, or was the group/family more accepting?

3) What are the features that you admire about the Stones? What did you see that was not so admirable?

4) How are the Stones like Tom Hanks' family in Philadelphia? Do you know of families in your church and community who have a gay or lesbian child (perhaps yours)? How have they dealt with the situation?

5) Perhaps some of the tenderest moments in the film are those between Sybil and Kelly. How do they seem so comfortable with each other? How is Kelly dealing with her secret?

6) How did you feel at the final scene that serves as an epilogue? The Family Stone Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V- ; L- ; S/N- . Running Time:

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