

"In the Name of The Father"

June 16, 2019

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Focus Statement: God is the father we never had. God is The Father we always had.

Function: Congregants will recognize the personal and limitless intimacy of God's fatherly love for us.

Reading: John Chapter 14: verses 6 - 10

In which Jesus is attempting to comfort and prepare the Apostles at The Last Supper. Thomas, and then Philip, express doubt and fear, children at heart, as they face the losses and insecurities of the coming days. Listen, for the Word of God, as though it were the first time you heard it...

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him. Philip said to him, 'Master, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you, I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works."

Leader: For the Word of God in Scripture, For the Word of God among us, For the Word of God within us, People: Thanks be to God!

Today, June 16, 2019 is Father's Day. Over all the years that Hallmark and Gibson and American Cards have advertised the date in front of our eyes, we have come to recognize it as the one day annually that we honor our dads. Although Father's Day was first celebrated only in the state of Washington on June 19, 1910, and Mother's Day became a nationwide celebration by President Woodrow Wilson's decree in 1914, Father's Day was not officially recognized nationwide until 58 years later, in 1972.

Today is also Sunday, a day of the week on which we have traditionally joined together to honor another Father.

Both share that same simple name: "Father"...

Now the Bible contains many words which are rich, challenging and complex, each inviting a lengthy sermon of their own, among them: Incarnation, Omnipotence, Rapture and Resurrection. Yet God chose a simple familiar two syllable word with which we could address and know Him. And He chose a word which had an earthly parallel so that we might begin to understand the relationship He planned for us to have with Him.

Here are some stories ABOUT fathers and FROM Fathers...remarkably hand in hand...

Story One:

When I was a kid, we lived in a split level house up in New York. My mom stayed home and took care of us; my dad was an FBI agent. Most nights, he would come home after we had eaten dinner and, after giving my mom a Carl Betz kiss, he would take off his suit coat and hang it on a wooden hanger in the hall closet. We knew what came next ...and my brother and I met him eagerly at the bottom of the short flight of stairs which led up to the bedrooms...

When we reached their bedroom, my dad opened the door, loosened his necktie and sat for just a moment on the side of the double bed before lounging back and extending his arms into an open T. My older brother and I quickly took our places in each bicep and faced the dark ceiling with eager anticipation. And we waited...gazing upwards.

You see, IF we had *been good*, the Love Bug would show up. The Love Bug, no doubt a distant relative of Tinker Bell's, was a small wisp of light which had the uncanny ability to answer simple Yes or No questions with either a vertical or a horizontal dance across the ceiling...*IF* we had, you know, been *GOOD*. On the other hand, if we hadn't, ...no Bug. And no matter how sweet our smiles, how mannered our polite urgings at the dark ceiling above, *IF* we hadn't been, you know, *good*, there was no Bug. What there *was* was a Good Cop, a sympathetic and supposedly surprised ally who gently asked us why we thought the Love Bug hadn't appeared that night and what we *might* have done differently during that day to deserve a visit. No Bad Cop. No lectures. Just some low key fatherly advice from a guy on our team.

And, darn, that Bug was *never* wrong. It *always* knew The Truth about the day.

And we learned two things:

1. You couldn't hide the truth and
2. You could survive your "trespasses", even your "debts".

Was it weeks, months, years later, we finally solved the mystery?

That innocent kiss in the foyer was the tip off from my mom, the informant. "Yes, they were good." or "No, there was a problem today", all revealed in a quick non-verbal glint of the eye. Based on that insider information, my dad either switched on the hall light at the bottom of the stairs – or not. If it were on, when he lay on his back on the bed, jacketless, his silver belt buckle reflected the overhead light from the hallway onto the bedroom ceiling. We were so enraptured with searching the ceiling for the first sign of the Bug, we failed to ever notice my dad's stomach ever so subtly waving back and forth or up and down, giving Tinker Bell a run for her money, and answering all of our Yes and No questions.

Oh, there was a third thing we learned too. A father's loving imagination could illuminate decades to come...

Matthew wrote in Chapter 5, verses 15-16:
"Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house."

"Go, My children, with My blessing..."

Story #2

As our family grew to five children, my dad decided to create what were then life-sized plywood painted figures of each of us to grace our front lawn at Christmastime. Depicted as white gowned angels whose halos were slipping sideways off our heads, we each held in our cartooned hands what my dad thought that we would carry into our future...and my dad proved pretty prophetic:

Donald held a football (and he played throughout high school),

I, a paint palette (albeit oils and not watercolor),

Kevin, a record player (Joel and Rob, see me later and I will tell you what those were), ("Scuse me a minute...)

Nancy was sucking her thumb (we're not even going there)

and Billy, poor Billy, slept on a cloud with a red horned tail sneaking out from under his gown.

Along with a wooden Christmas tree, a street sign and a pet beagle, the display sat proudly under our living room window, lit by four spotlights whose extension cords snaked across the lawn like tributaries to a river until they reached the single heavy duty cord hanging from the porch light.

There was, however, The 11th Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Cut Across The Lawn. Under penalty of electrocution... or perhaps worse, the collapse of all 8 figures in a tangled lasso of thick red, green and black cords.

Wise as we were, we all assumed that no one would ever detect a quick and expeditious sprint from the side street to the front door, right behind the figures. Dumb as we were, we never predicted that the gigantic resulting shadows that raced across the living room wall inside would give us up every time as the spotlights created a veritable moving Line Up and the FBI agent gently, calmly, patiently explained *once again* ..."for our own goods"...about the cords.

Proverbs 3 verses 11-12 teach us:

"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline,
and do not resent his rebuke,
because the Lord disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in."

"Go, My children, with My blessing..."

Last Story

When my older brother was about 5 back in the early 50's, he needed to have his tonsils out and he was afraid. Tonsils then were a big deal and the promise of ice cream to his heart's delight could not overcome the fear he felt of being left in the hospital for a couple of days away from my parents. He would *not* let go of my dad.

Eventually, the doctors suggested a plan which they said worked time and time again. As my brother was lying on his back on the gurney and being led into the surgery area feet first, my dad was to be at the back end, over his head. His job was to quietly and calmly remind Donald that he would be fine ...over and over again. The doctors told my dad that, when the ceiling lighting changed, that would be his signal to let go of the gurney and the doctors would continue to steer their young charge from the foot end and into the surgery area. My dad's last memories were of my brother's meek voice saying over and over again as he disappeared down the hall, "I'm okay, Daddy. As long as I know you're with me, I'm okay." And as the voice trailed off into the brighter lights and the double doors closed, the FBI agent, surrendering his son to the OR, was reduced to quiet sobs.

John taught us in Chapter 12, verses 35-37 like this:
"Then Jesus told them, 'You are going to have the light just *a little* while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in

the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.' When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them."

"Go, My children, with My blessing..."

I had a pretty incredible dad. He passed away 5 years ago at the age of 96. He was never in formal charge of teaching us about religion. *Heck, he was Lutheran.* (That was my mother's job. She was Catholic.) Yet, looking back, I find how much he did teach us about a Father's love - with both an upper case and a lower case F. I don't know that he could quote much of the Bible but he could sure live it.

St. Francis of Assisi once said "Preach the gospel at all times. When all else fails, use words."

In a few minutes, we will pray The Lord's Prayer together...by now so rote in our minds and mouths that we might overlook the opening two words: "Our Father". Have you ever paused to let the privilege of those words sink in? Have you ever considered the *intimacy* of them, the figurative *umbilical cord* of them? Just try substituting "Our Lord" or "Our God" or "Our Omnipotence" for them and feel the undeniable distance of relationship that results. And *this* was the prayer that Jesus specifically cited as the one that would please His Father the most and even elevated that name to "Hallowed"...

I also find it more than coincidental that, of *all* the nouns He could have chosen, God had given my dad the same name as His own: "Father". And there was a purpose in that assignation: To help me understand the gospel lessons of God in my father as well as to now understand the bits of my father in helping me conceive of God.

There was *nothing* my brothers or sister could have done for which my dad would not have forgiven us. Maybe the Love Bug would not have shown up one night and maybe we would have been gently read our rights in the glare of the lawn spotlights but there was *NOTHING* that we could have done that would have cost us my dad's love, his earthly blessing.

"Go, my children, with my blessing..."

I think those years were a practice run for us to understand the unconditional love God has for us. Ever patient. Ever gentle. Ever forgiving.

Whether we try to bluff our ways into making God think that we have in fact, you know, *been good*. Whether we bring down the whole display on the lawn in a tangle of electrical cords. Or whether we so vulnerably trust in His continual company and comfort as we are being wheeled down the Hall of Life, I think that they are all God's ways of hinting at why the names were the same and letting us *begin* to grasp His love for us, His children.. Not just on a single day of the year called Father's Day, not just on Sundays, but every day.

No matter our age, we're all still comforted to enjoy being God's children and, as much as we like to achieve responsibility and title, prestige and stature, as adults, who among us does not prize the right to figuratively climb like a child onto our Heavenly Father's lap and snuggle safely against His soft inner arms?

Ephesians Chapter 3, verses 14-19 promise us:

"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how *wide and long and high and deep* is the love of Christ, and to know this love that *surpasses knowledge*—that you may be *filled* to the measure of all the fullness of God."

In case we still didn't get it, *listen again* to the scripture which preceded this sermon, to what John wrote:

"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you *really* know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you *do* know him and have seen him.'

And Philip said, 'Lord, *show us* the Father and that will be enough for us.'

Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? *Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?* The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.'"

2 Corinthians Chapter 6, verse 18?

"I will be a Father to you,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty."

Go, my children, with My blessing...

Happy Father's Day... every day. Thanks be to God.

Benediction:

"and ,now, in the name of The Father, from the Father of all of us to the father in
each of us, go, my children, with my Blessing..."