

“Father’s Day”
Matthew 9:35-38
6/15/08
Brentwood First Presbyterian
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Introduction

Before we begin, I want to wish all the Dads in the room, “Happy Father’s Day.” Fathers don’t get much respect anymore.

A doting father used to sing his little children to sleep. This was something he could do at night to help out. And he kept up this task until one night he overheard his four-year-old give her younger sibling this advice, **“If you pretend you’re asleep,” she said, “he stops.”**

Bill Cosby observed once that boys grow up spending hours and hours throwing footballs and going to games with their Dads. And when they make it big as a college athlete, before the big bowl game they get interviewed, and the first thing they say is, **“Hi Mom!!”**

Garrison Keilor tells us that Father's Day goes back to a Sunday morning in May of 1909, when a woman was sitting in church in Spokane, Washington, listening to a Mother's Day sermon. She thought of her father who had raised her and her siblings after her mother died in childbirth, and she thought that fathers should get recognition, too. So she asked her minister if he would deliver a sermon honoring fathers on her father's birthday, which was coming up in June, and the minister did. And the tradition of Father's Day caught on, though rather slowly. Mother's Day became an official holiday in 1914; Father's Day, not until 1972. Mother's Day is still the busiest day of the year for florists, restaurants and long distance phone companies. **Father's Day is the day on which the most collect phone calls are made.**

No, fathers don’t get much respect anymore.

But how important fathers are! A study of church attendance showed **that if only Mom attended church regularly, only 15 percent of children had a faith life as adults.** But if both Mom and Dad attended church regularly, **72 percent of their children had a faith life as adults.** So the church is thankful for fathers. And so are mothers, needless to say. The number of young women having to raise children in a single parent household nowadays is startling. Of course, it is not always the mother who is raising the children. Again, we can be thankful for fathers who take on their share of responsibility for nurturing their young.

The National Center for Fathering conducts Father of the Year Essay Contests in partnership with local schools and sponsoring organizations. **100,000 school**

children submitted essays on the topic, "What my Father Means to Me."

Here is a sampling of essays.

A first grader writes, "My dad is the best dad ever. I would kiss a pig for him."

Another first grader writes, "My dad is a Frito-Lay man. That is an important job because Frito-Lay means chips, which is food. That is so important because you could not live without food."

A third grader writes, "The dad in my life isn't really my dad. He's my Grandpa. But he's been like a dad to me since before I was born . . . I hope that as I get older Grandpa will teach me all the stuff he knows about wood, and first-aid, and everything else he knows about. My Grandpa isn't my father, but I wouldn't trade him for all the dads in the world."

A fourth grader writes, "Sometimes as a joke I'll put my stinky socks in his briefcase, so at work the next day he will think of me! He's always at the concerts and plays that I'm in, even though he lives about an hour away."

A fifth grade girl writes, ". . . You know what else my dad does? He braids my hair. I'm the only girl I know whose dad braids her hair. I think that's a perfect dad. He already is the world's greatest dad to me. I just wanted everyone to know that."

A sixth grader writes, "One time I had an assembly and I was a soloist and my dad was in the first row and after my song I smiled at my dad and my dad smiled back and started crying. That was the best thing I ever saw."

Yes, this is Father's Day, when Dads are complimented, pampered, and given gifts. One little boy gave an interesting description of Father' Day. He said, **"Father's Day is just like Mother's Day; only you don't spend as much on a present."**

This is a tough time to be a parent because of all the competing claims on our time, energy, and money. The typical parent, mother or father, could be responding to all of the following claims simultaneously:

The Parent Teacher Organization needs a new treasurer, and you are nominated.

One of the church leaders begs you to sign on for another year as a Sunday School teacher.

The president of the Civitan Club calls and begs you to be chairman of fruitcake sales this year, and reminds you of all the good causes this money supports.

The cub scouts are desperate for another leader; unless one is found, a den will have to be discontinued.

You just learned at work that a coming retirement will cause some reshuffling. A branch manager's position will open up. Someone who takes on extra projects and shows lots of enthusiasm is going to move up. It could be you.

The president of United Way begs you to coordinate the gifts from major companies in your area. He reminds you of the agencies depending on these funds.

You have one more patient to see and supper is ready at home.

Then, as you face all these choices, you glance at that picture of your family on your desk. The children are growing so fast. Your spouse, only half in jest, suggests that she has to make an appointment to see you. Don't they have legitimate claims on you?

All men practice the art of fathering, regardless whether they have biological children or not. It is said that it takes a village to raise a child. And men are certainly a part of that village.

I. Jesus tells us the ministries he wants his disciples (and fathers) to continue

- 1) Jesus commissions his first disciples, and fathers, to continue his ministries. **But not the lonely task of a spiritual entrepreneur who blazes his own trail. Rather, Jesus' disciples, and fathers, are invited to engage in the missions established by Jesus himself.**
- 2) Jesus' first commission to his disciples, and fathers, is **to teach in the home and in places of worship.** Fathers who **teach their children they are loved unconditionally**, teach them how to love others. Fathers who **teach their children that they are human beings worthy of self-respect**, teach them to respect others. Fathers **who teach their children how to be happy**, teach them how to make others happy.
- 3) Jesus' second commission to his disciples, and fathers, is **to proclaim the good news of God's βασιλεια in their homes**, but also to both the rural poor and the urban wealthy. Role modeling for their children. Echoes of Harry Chapin's song, *Cats in the cradle*: "I'm gonna be like you, Dad. You know I'm gonna be like you."

- 4) Jesus' third commission to his disciples, and fathers, is **to heal the νοσον and the μαλακιαν**. The NRSV translates νοσον as disease and μαλακιαν as sickness. But if one looks up νοσον and μαλακιαν in the Greek lexicon for better translations of these two words: the νοσον are those people with physical malady and the μαλακιαν are those with emotional malady. **Jesus commissions fathers to provide for the physical and emotional health of their children, but to also reach out beyond their own families in their healing ministry.** Role modeling for their children. Again, echoes of Harry Chapin's song, "I'm gonna be like you, Dad. You know I'm gonna be like you."
- 5) **But we all need motivation** to do that which Jesus commissions us to do.

II. **And Jesus gives us the motivation to follow through. That motivation is compassion.**

- 1) Many parents rationalize by saying, "I don't spend much time with my kids, but what we have is **quality time**."

Listen to what Harry Chapin says about quality time.

A child arrived just the other day,
He came to the world in the usual way.
But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay.
He learned to walk while I was away.

"When you coming home, dad?" "I don't know when,
But we'll get together then.
You know we'll have a good time then."

My son turned ten just the other day.
He said, "Thanks for the ball, dad, come on let's play.
Can you teach me to throw?" I said, "Not today,
I got a lot to do." He said, "That's ok."

And here is the scary part of the song by Harry Chapin, the role modeling part:

As he walked away, his smile never dimmed,
Said, **"I'm gonna be like you, Dad.
You know I'm gonna be like you."**

I was in a meeting one afternoon when a man raised his hand and said, "Mr. Chairman, I know what we are doing is important. But I

must leave at 5:00 PM sharp. My son's Little League game starts at 5:30 and I promised him I would be there." Everybody around the table beamed. **Here was a man who could say no when something more important required a yes.**

- 2) **Jesus feels compassion for the crowds.** More than just sympathy, the Greek verb is *σπλαγγνον*, that is, literally, Jesus' heart spills out on them. The Message Bible translates this more simply, that when he looks out on the crowds, **his heart breaks.** Because the crowds are weary and distressed. Jesus commissions his disciples, and fathers, to look on the weak, including their children, with compassion.
- 3) As Jesus walks through Judea, he heals people of long standing illnesses and freely offers the wonderful news that God is at work in the world. **He literally dismantles hell every step of the way, destroying it with the word and works of God.** And he commissions his first disciples, and fathers, to do the same. Childhood for some is hell. But it does not have to be that way. **Fathers destroy what could be the hell of childhood by embodying Jesus' words and deeds.**
- 4) But Jesus does not mean for his disciples, or for fathers, **to be lone rangers.**

III. **Jesus tells us we should pray about our commission first, as the harvest is not by our own will and imagination, but by God's**

- 1) We might anticipate Jesus to say, "You disciples go into the fields and gather the harvest."
- 2) But instead, **Jesus tells them, and fathers, to pray.** In so doing, he tells them, and fathers, our commission, originates from God, and not from ourselves.
- 3) **It is said no one can lead a child to God as well as a parent.** If the parents fail, chances are small that the church or a friend can make up that deficit. Children are so bright. If they sense that the **Bible is not a vitally important book** in your life, chances are that it won't be in theirs. **If they seldom see you pray,** except at meal-time, they will not take prayer seriously. **If children sense that Sunday worship is a grim duty rather than a treasured privilege,** they will stop attending as soon as they get a chance. All of us take our dogs to obedience training every single week, which costs us money. All of us do this. Don't miss a single week. I know we did this with our dogs. And many of us have paid a lot of money

to go to spirituality retreats. **The only thing church costs is what you put in the offering plate, and church has more spiritual benefits.**

Conclusion

There is a story of **two paddleboat steamers**. They leave Memphis about the same time, traveling down the Mississippi to New Orleans. As they traveled side by side, crew members of one boat make disparaging remarks about the slowness of the other boat. Words are exchanged. Challenges are made.

And the race begins. The competition is keen as the boats roar down the Mississippi. One boat begins falling behind. Not enough fuel. There is plenty of coal for the trip, but not enough for a race. As the boat drops back, an enterprising crew member takes some of the ship's cargo and tosses it into the ovens. Their boat begins to catch up, so they make fuel out of more and more cargo. **They finally win the race, but in the process they burned their cargo, the very material they had been hired to transport.**

Parents, our primary mission is not to win a rat race, but to faithfully care for those persons entrusted to us, especially our children.

Our daily passage through the streets to our offices and our homes are probably not as dramatic as Jesus' walk through Judea 2000 years ago. So you might be asking yourself right now how can you help usher in God's βασιλεια, God's kingdom, that is God's reign. Maybe you can start by taking notice of the people, including the children, around you. Become aware of their need for compassion and God's love. **And as God's Spirit works through you, maybe you too can bring God's light into the darkest places.**

Four ministers were talking one day about translations of the Bible. One said, "I like the New King James Version best. The beauty of the language and the rhythm of the cadence is unsurpassed." Another said, "I like the New Revised Standard Version because it is the closest to the actual Greek and Hebrew." Another said, "I like the Message Bible because it is easy to read." The fourth thought a moment and then he said, "Of all the translations, I think I like my father's the best." One said, "You mean your father has translated the Bible?" He said, **"Oh yes, everyday he translated the Bible to me in his life of love, compassion, forgiveness and sacrifice. Because of his translation, I trusted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior."**

Glory be to God, hallelujah, and all God's children say