

Wesley United Methodist Church

June 21, 2015

“Fatherhood.”

Matthew 7:7-12

Some years back someone wrote a book simply entitled FATHERHOOD. If you ever get a chance to read it I suggest you do. It is thoroughly humorous and you will also learn a few things along the way. I would like to share with you two observations the writer makes about Fathers. The author writes:

Now that my father is a grandfather, he just can't wait to give money to my kids. But when I was a kid and I asked him for fifty cents, he would tell me the story of his life. How he got up at 4 AM when he was seven years old and walked twenty-three miles to milk ninety cows. And the farmer for whom he worked had no bucket, so he had to squirt the milk into his little hand then walk eight miles to the nearest can. All for 5 cents a month. The result was that I never got my 50 cents.

But now he tells my children every time he comes to the house: Well, lets see how much money old Granddad has for his wonderful kids.” And the minute they take the money out of his hands I call them over to me and I snatch it away from them. Because that is MY money.

The other story that the author tells that I like is the difference between Mother's Day and Father's Day. He insists that Mother's Day is a much bigger deal because Mothers are more organized. Mothers say to their children: Now here is a list of what I want. Go get the money from your father and you surprise me on Mother's Day. You do that for me.

For Father's Day I give each of my five kids \$20 so that they can go out and buy me a present—a total of \$100. They go to the store and buy two packages of underwear, each of which costs \$5 and contains three shorts. They tear them open and each kid wraps up one pair, the sixth pair of underwear going to the Salvation Army. Therefore, on Father's Day I am walking around with new underwear and my kids are walking around with \$90 worth of my change in their pocket.

Well, of course. Father's Day is technically not a religious holiday; it is a secular day. But, it is not, for that reason, less appropriate for our consideration. We also don't simply want to give equal billing to fathers this morning because we gave homage to mothers a month ago. We want to recognize dads for another very important reason. The message that is going out to so much of society today is that fathers are simply not needed. While the number may be small there are some women who actually chose to be single parent mothers. And there are far too many men in America today who father children that they have no intention of raising. Someone therefore, needs to send out the message loud and clear that fathers play a critical role in the life of the family, that they are needed, and that God expects something of them. Fathers will have a powerful impact upon their families if they connect with God. It has long been observed that our children get their view of God from their fathers. The way a father treats a child, speaks to his child, disciplines his child plays a major role in the formation of that child's understanding of God. If a father is supportive, loving, and attentive then a child grows to see God as their caring Heavenly Father.

Erma Bombeck described what the scene must have looked like when God created fathers. She writes: When the good Lord was creating Fathers he started with a tall frame. And a female angel nearby said, “What kind of Father is that? If you're going to make children so close to the ground, why have you put Fathers up so high? He won't be able to shoot marbles without kneeling, tuck a child in bed without bending, or even kiss a child without a lot of stooping.” And God smiled and said, “Yes, but if I make him child-size, who would children have to look up to?”

And when God made a Father's hands, they were large and callous. And the angel shook her head sadly and said, “Do you know what you're doing? Large hands are clumsy. They can't manage diaper pins, small buttons, rubber bands on pony tails or even remove splinters caused by baseball bats.” And God smiled and said, “I know, but they're large enough to hold everything a small boy empties from his pockets at the end of the day...yet small enough to cup a child's face in his hands.”

And then God molded long, slim legs and broad shoulders. And the angel nearly had a heart attack. "Boy, this is the end of the week, all right," she clucked. Do you realize you just made a father without a lap? How is he going to pull a child close to him without the kid falling between his legs?" And God smiled and said "A mother needs a lap. A father needs strong shoulders to pull a sled, balance a boy on a bicycle, and hold a sleepy head on the way home from the circus."

God was in the middle of creating two of the largest feet anyone had ever seen when the angel couldn't contain herself any longer. "That's not fair. Do you honestly think those large boats are going to dig out of bed early in the morning when the baby cries? Or walk through a small birthday party without crushing at least three guests?" And God smiled and said, "They'll work. You'll see. They'll support a small child who wants to ride a horse, or scare off mice in the summer cabin, or display shoes that will be a challenge to fill."

God worked throughout the night, giving the Father few words, but a firm authoritative voice; eyes that saw everything, but remained calm and tolerant. Finally, almost as an afterthought, he added tears. Then he turned to the angel and said, "Now, are you satisfied that he can love as much as a mother?" And Erma Bombeck concluded, "The angel shutteth up."

While it is obvious to us that God created Adam and Eve, we don't readily consider the fact that the difference between men and women are God-made and suited to the task of raising a child. This is why fathers need to be connected to God. Your eyes, your hands, your strength, your heart, your mind, your soul have been given to you not only for your pleasure but for the pleasure and well being of your children. And, it is only possible to use these gifts to their good purpose when God is allowed in. When we allow him to define who we are and who we can be for our families God will be there with us.

It is also important for a father to connect with his family. I think we can also say that fathers are called upon to be nurturers. Sometimes we forget that there are possible things that are happening. It is not enough for dads to be the breadwinner. Dads need to help with the nurturing as well. What I mean by that is that when a Dad interacts with his child and the child starts crying, the father cannot take the child to the mother. That gives a child the signal that the one who gives the comfort and love is the mother.

Even Jesus himself was greatly influenced by his father. When Jesus was born his father was present. When Jesus suddenly disappeared in Jerusalem at the age of twelve we're told both parents were frantically searching for him. Jesus learned his father's trade of being a carpenter. And during Jesus' ministry he prayed to his heavenly Father and he even referred to him as Abba, or daddy.

Not every man is God's gift to fatherhood. But fathers who connect with God have the extra edge to be a better father. I don't want to make a laundry list of off the possibilities that are out there for a man to become a better father. But in Matthew 7:11 Jesus speaks to following words: "If you then, who are evil, can give good gifts to your children... Let's stop here... What did that say? It begins by calling parents evil. That is not very flattering, but it is quite truthful, even blunt. We know we are not perfect, we know that we make mistakes, we misjudge situations, that we do good things sometimes for the wrong reasons. In other words, we are sinners. Don't despair. Let's see what else it says. Though we are sinners, we still know how to give good gifts to our children.

This is speaking, of course, about grace. Even though we are sinners, good things can still come from us. We will make mistakes, but every once in a while we also get it right. We have the ability to give good gifts to our children. We know how to teach them right from wrong. We know how to make them feel loved. In fact, fathers can do things for them that no one else can do. Even though we are sinners, we have enough grace within us to still do right for our children.

God bless those fathers who are doing good for their children; the fathers who not only show duty but love. If we want to touch the future beyond our own life, the best way to do it is to be a loving parent. Amen.