

## Wesley United Methodist Church

June 19, 2016

Loved by the Father.

Galatians 3:1-14

A letter was read at a family retreat. The letter told of a man's life-long desire to hear his father say, "I love you." His father had died in World War II, when this man was only three years old. His mother had often assured him of his father's love as he was growing up, but it didn't fill the void he felt.

One day, this man, now 40 years old, was helping his mother move. She gave him an old Army picture of his father. The picture suddenly slipped out of his hands and the frame and glass shattered all over the floor. As he picked up the mess, the man noticed a piece of paper wedged behind the photo. It was a letter from his father. He had known that he might die in the war, so he had written a letter to his three-year-old son and hidden it behind the picture. In the letter, the father shared all his love for his son. So at the age of 40, this man finally found what he had spent his life searching for: his father's love.

Imagine that you were going through a difficult time in your life, and you opened your Bible looking for encouragement. Imagine then that a letter fell out and that it was on this passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians.

"For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male nor female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

If you didn't know anything else about our faith, there is enough encouragement and love in this one passage to keep you going for a long time.

First of all, you would be reminded that you are a child of God. Those of you who are parents know that children need several elements in childhood to allow them to become joyful and happy adults. The first element is unconditional love from at least one adult in our lives. This unconditional love gives self-esteem and encourages us to see the world as a friendly place. The second element is discovering your passions through play. Most of us, in our play time, discovered where our true talents and passions lay. Some children take joy in telling stories, or building backyard forts, or taking the toaster apart. These early play times are great indicator of that child's later interests.

The third and fourth necessary childhood elements are practicing and mastering your passions. It gives self-confidence and makes them less afraid to try new things. Finally, a child needs positive recognition from others. Children who experience these things are more likely to have joy later in life. Not every child will have those experiences, because not every parent is a perfect parent. Then on the other hand, what's a perfect parent?

Let me tell you about a lady names Karen. She was abandoned by her alcoholic and abusive father early in childhood. On Father's Day, her mother made her write a card to the father she never knew. He never responded. Although he never accepted her, she found a different way to fill the void. She learned at church that God could be her father.

Whenever she went out to play on her roller skates, she yelled, "Hey, God! Look at me!" She felt a special awareness of God's presence as if he were smiling on her from heaven. Rather than focusing her attention on the man who abandoned her, she directed her affection toward God, who is a father to the fatherless (Psalm 68:5). Although she never received approval from her earthly father, Karen found security through her heavenly father.

"For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith," writes St. Paul. Who are we? Let me hear you say it. Who are we? Children of God. God loves us even more than our earthly mothers and fathers. God loves us without reservations, conditions, or restraints.

Actually, it doesn't matter who we are. Paul writes: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothes yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew nor Greek...for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Here is the second thing we need to see. Unconditional love can change our lives. One of the most controversial issues in education over the past decade or so, has been the role of self-esteem in children's lives. Some well-meaning educators have cheapened the concept of self-esteem by giving children rewards even when they had not done their best.

Erik Weihenmayer is blind, and yet he has accomplished many extraordinary things in his life, including climbing four of the seven biggest mountains in the world. In his book, *Touch the Top of the World*, Erik tells about his life's journey. Once, in the first grade, Erik came home from school bragging that he had gotten all the words right on a spelling quiz. He proudly showed his mother the paper. At first she was ecstatic and then, looking over the paper, she grew silent. The quiz had pictures of animals and the children were supposed to spell the names underneath. His quiz had a series of illegible marks scribbled across the page with a yellow crayon. A smiley face sat on top of the page giving his work its

approval. Erik could hear his mother mumbling words of disapproval. The next day his mother showed up in class and approached the teacher, quiz in hand. "With 15 children in a class," his mother said, "I'm sure it's difficult to give special attention to every child, but when a child hands in a paper full of yellow scribbles, surely it doesn't deserve a smiley face. He's blind," his mother said, "but he is not stupid, and he can do better work than this. Darn smiley face. Draw a pitchfork next time. Anything but a smiley face." "I have never taught a student like Erik," the teacher said defensively. "I was just attempting to boost his self-esteem." "He doesn't need self-esteem," his mother said. "He needs to know how to spell." That night, his mother sat Erik down and pulled out the same quiz. With black pen, she made him spell out the names of the pictures all over again.

He rewrote the words over the yellow marks. He says, "Each new stroke of the solid black pen gave me a sense of security and comfort, and seemed to bring a layer of order to the mayhem beneath." Erik knew that his mother's love would not be diminished if he failed. But also knew that part of self-esteem is a sense of competence that comes only from hard work and discipline.

A sense of self-worth is critical to living the abundant life. I am, of course, no psychologist. But this is important. Many persons who try to follow Christ have never opened their lives to God's unconditional love. Here is your chance to let go and let God show you his unconditional love by realizing that Christ died in your behalf. He wants you to know that God is a God of love. That's why Father's Day is such an appropriate day to deal with Paul's words. "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith..."

We are children of God. We are loved without limits or reservation. Think about that a while and it will change your life. Amen.