**June 19, 2022 Matthew 7:7-11**

***A Father’s Love***

**Scripture: *Matthew 7:7-11 NRSV***

*(7)Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. (8)For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (9)Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? (10)Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? (11)If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!.*

**Notes:**

1. How would you describe your ***father***?
   1. Some ***dads*** do better than others;
   2. Men and women ***experience*** life differently
   3. How does a young man know how to be a father except by doing what his ***father*** did?
   4. Most ***fathers*** do the very best they know how to do.
2. ***Jesus*** had a lot to say when it comes to a father’s love.
   * 1. *(25)"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (26)Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Matthew 6:25-26 NRSV*
     2. Jesus also said: *(12)What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? (13)And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. (14)So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost. Matthew 18:12-14 NRSV*
   1. A father’s love is a ***reflection*** of God’s love
   2. The most dramatic expression of the Father’s love is when God ***gave*** ***himself*** in the form of Jesus
      1. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. John 3:16 NRSV”*
   3. Jesus gave his life to ***redeem*** us from our fallen nature
      1. *“(15)For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" (16)it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (17)and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. Romans 8:15-17 NRSV*
      2. *“(16)What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. …(18)and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 NRSV*
3. We want the best for our ***children***.
   1. We want them to be men and women of ***faith***.
   2. It begins with ***relationships***,
   3. Make this relationship one of mutual ***respect*** and ***trust***.
   4. Develop a rapport, one in which they seek your ***advice*** and ***counsel***;
   5. Live your life as a ***living*** ***example*** of what our good, good, Father is in our life.
   6. The gift of ***faith*** is the greatest gift we can give our children;

**Script:**

Today we celebrate Father’s Day, and while I did not prepare a special message for Mother’s Day, I am compelled on this day and in this moment to reflect on my life as a father and the relationships I have with my father and my children. So many times, as I look back at my experience as a father, I must shake my head and wonder, “What was I thinking?” How often, I have done what seemed right at the moment only to look back and think that I may have messed up whatever action was taking place. Moments when as a father I did the wrong thing or said the wrong phrase, or even said the right thing with the wrong tone or attitude; and I am left with the regret of not getting things right when it was most beneficial.

It’s a tremendous gift and with it, an awesome responsibility.   I don’t think I’m exaggerating when I say that, beyond all the things men seek to accomplish in life, being a good father is, by far, the greatest opportunity … and the greatest challenge. We celebrated Mother’s Day a few weeks ago, and by rights we should. And in the same right fathers deserve to be celebrated as well. While it is difficult to nail down, we can all agree that there is a distinctive difference between a mother’s love and a father’s love for their children.

From the first moments of life, children look to their mothers for sustenance and comfort.  Fathers look on from a second tier.  No matter how active the father is in feeding and rocking and cuddling the baby, changing diapers – the works – it’s still the mother that the child looks to for warmth and security when the chips are down. It’s as if the child intuitively knows the mother but has to get to know the father – as if the child naturally sinks into the mother’s breast, but cautiously eyes the father at a distance wondering, “Who’s the big guy standing in the corner?”

The starting place for any Mother’s Day or Father’s Day sermon is the Fifth Commandment: Exodus 20:12 NRSV “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” But today, I’d like to take a closer look at the relationship we have – or have had – with our fathers.  At its best, a father’s love, no matter how imperfect and rough around the edges it may be, is still a reflection of God’s love; just as Jesus told his disciples, in our sermon passage today. Stand and share in the reading of our passage today, Matthew 7:7-12.

**(7)Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. (8)For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (9)Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? (10)Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? (11)If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! Matthew 7:7-11 NRSV**

The question that we must consider is this, “If we, who are evil, give good gifts to our children, how much more will our father in heaven give good gifts to us, who ask him?” This sounds like a good father doesn’t it? So, how would you describe your father? Is he soft and gentle or harsh and demanding? Was he there for you when you needed him, or was he always on the go and away from home a lot of time? Was he affectionate or did he stay at a distance? Was he easy to read, or was he reserved and keeping to himself? Was he an outdoorsman or a homebody? Did he read to you and play with you as you were growing up? Did he teach you to do things, what practical skills did you learn from your father? Was he a good listener; could you share your thoughts and feelings with him without getting a lecture in return? Was he a man of faith? Did he share his faith with you to experience the peace of God’s presence and the power of God’s love? Was he authoritative or easy going? Was he quick to discipline or did he give you freedom to explore and make your own discoveries, decisions, and even sometimes mistakes? If you are a son, is your father someone you wanted to be like when you grew up? If you are a daughter, was your father the type of man you hoped to marry someday? What did you love most about your father? If you had a chance, what words of gratitude would you share with him today?

These are just a few of the questions that come to mind when trying to describe a parent and your relationship with them. But when it comes to fathering, some dads do better than others; and some don’t do very well at all. There are a lot of reasons why. The most obvious reason is the male ego.  It’s hard to be attentive to children when you’re caught up in yourself. Beyond ego is the way men are wired.  Some blame it on the “Y chromosome.”  And it’s true: Men and women experience life differently and, while that’s an asset when we work together and complement each other’s strengths, it can be a problem when it comes to raising children.  This skill comes more naturally to mothers; and, it’s something fathers have to learn. Let us not forget the maturity factor.  If you marry young and have your children right away, you could be a father by the time you reach your mid-twenties.  By the time you’re in your mid-forties, they’re grown and gone.  Think about it: A lot of men don’t start growing up until they’re in their forties! Which can make for some difficulties raising kids at a young age. Finally, there’s the generational effect.  How does a young man know how to be a father except by doing what his father did?  Many times, a frustrated wife will say that her husband, “He’s just like his father!”  The good news is, if you had a wise and loving father, you have a lot of strengths to build on; if your father was a klutz, you’re apt to repeat a lot of not-so-healthy traits.

The bottom line is we don’t live in a perfect world.  Most fathers fall somewhere along the scale of exceptional to average to poor.  If your father was exceptional, consider yourself lucky.  Most fathers are average, at best. Regardless if your father was nearly perfect in every way or just the opposite, now’s a good time to cut him some slack.  At this age and stage of life, the best gift you can give your father for Father’s Day is the gift of forgiveness … and, with it, a healthy dose of genuine gratitude. Most fathers do the very best they know how to do.  So, if you’re holding on to some bitter feelings because your father hurt you or failed you in some way, now’s the time to get over it and let it go.  Focus on what he did for you, or tried to do.  And know this: You carry his genes.  Honor him by carrying them on to a higher level of excellence.

When it comes to a father’s love, Jesus had a lot to say and they all point to the love of our heavenly father. As we heard in the text this morning, if your child asks you for something to eat, you wouldn’t give him a stone or a snake.  So, if you who are only human know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give you the gifts of life in all its abundance, if you ask.  Jesus said, *(25)"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (26)Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Matthew 6:25-26 NRSV*

Jesus also said: *(12)What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? (13)And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. (14)So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost. Matthew 18:12-14 NRSV*

One of his greatest teachings on fatherhood was the Parable of the Prodigal Son.  You know it as well as I do.  A father had two sons.  One was faithful and true and served his father as a loyal and devoted servant; the other was wild and reckless and rebelled against his father and did all sorts of shameful things to discredit his father’s good name.  Yet, in spite of everything, the father loved them both, just the same.  And when the wild and reckless son came home, he greeted him with open arms and rejoiced that he’d come to his senses.  What’s more, he threw him a big party and invited everyone to attend – especially his brother … to let bygones be bygones and live together in peace and harmony, as family.  Jesus wanted us to know this is the nature of a father’s love.

Ideally, a father’s love is a reflection of God’s love – it’s grace-filled, merciful, forgiving, patient, kind and, most importantly, unconditional – not something you earn by doing and saying the right things, but a gift that’s given freely and will never, ever be taken away. The most dramatic expression of the Father’s love came at the moment God gave himself in the form of Jesus to redeem us from our sinful state.  *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. John 3:16 NRSV”*

God-in-Christ – Jesus – laid down his life for the sins of the whole world.  He gave his life to redeem us from our fallen nature and reconcile us to God and each other.  Through faith in him we’re able to live as children of the heavenly Father and heirs of his eternal kingdom.  Paul writes in Romans, *“(15)For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" (16)it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (17)and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. Romans 8:15-17 NRSV* And to the Corinthians, he echoes what God told Samuel concerning the people of Israel, *“(16)What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. …(18)and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 NRSV*

As fathers, as parents, and as members of the church, we want the best for our children.  We want them to be successful, well-adjusted and happy.  We want them to be responsible citizens and contributing members of society.  Most importantly, we want them to be men and women of faith – to know for themselves the love of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

What can you do to assist the creation of the next generation of Jesus followers, the next generation of the church? It begins with relationships, obviously if you are their parent you have a relationship, but if you are an acquaintance, you can develop a relationship with these youngsters. Work to make this relationship one of mutual respect and trust. Work to develop a rapport where they seek your advice and counsel; and they follow it. But above all else, live your life as a living example of what our good, good, father represents in our life. Be a living example of the Father’s love. Show them what a life of faith looks like and teach them to live faith in their life as well.

When it’s all said and done, the gift of faith is the greatest gift we can give our children; this gift will help them know, that beyond all the hopes and fears and uncertainties of this mortal life, God will be with them to give them the gift of life in abundance through faith in Jesus Christ.  And that is the ultimate expression of a father’s love.