

Empire Church of the Brethren

Sunday Service Sermons

18 June 2023

Fathers and The Father

Text: "But the father said to his servants, Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate."

Jesus calls God "Father".

He used the word meaning the father you can come to and sit in his lap.

In this intimate and intensely personal name, Jesus swept away all speculative attempts to name the Mystery,

The "Unmoved Mover," "First Cause", and "Ground of Being" all suffer by comparison to Jesus' simple appeal to "our Father which art in heaven".

In the story of the prodigal son, Jesus gave us a parable that can be mined again and again for its wealth of insight into God's way with his children.

The story is the father's story.

He is the central character when the story is heard as a whole.

Jesus' point is clear: Our heavenly Father is like this earthly father who loves both of his sons and waits eagerly for each son's return and reconciliation.

Fathers who want to be like The Father can glean two great truths from today's Scripture reading:

(1) fathers learn how to treat their children by considering God's way with them.

(2) Fathers can enrich their understanding of God The Father from experiences they have as human fathers.

The first truth helps fathers in a practical way to excel in the most important job a man can do, to be an effective father.

The second truth helps fathers use the insights they have gained from being fathers to fulfill the most important privilege a man is ever given, to worship and rejoice in God The Father.

Men learn how to be fathers by watching God's way of fathering them.

God The father never stops loving, and neither should human fathers.

The father in the parable waited and watched for his son to return.

Jesus does not say how long, but we can infer that he would have waited and watched as long as the son was gone.

Fathers and mothers sometimes go through recurring anguish over the negligence and recklessness of their children.

How long should we care?

How long should we keep watching?

As long as it takes!

God loves his people with an everlasting love, and fathers are called to love their children in the same manner.

God the father balances freedom with responsibility, and so should human fathers.

The younger son was free to leave.

The father painfully allows the son to find his own way back.

When the boy returns, broken and repentant, the father rejoices; but he will not let his boy back home on the son's terms: "Make me like one of your hired servants."

The boy was born to be a son, and the father will not let him retreat from that responsibility.

It is easier to be a servant than an heir.

When we have been wounded and our self-confidence shaken, we are often willing to settle for security alone, but God's tough love places the responsibility of sonship squarely on our shoulders. God's confidence that we can be sons and daughters gives us courage to be just that.

God loves all his children, and so should human fathers.

The elder brother was jealous because of all the attention being lavished on "this son of yours".

He would not call him his brother.

"You never gave me so much as a kid goat, but for him you killed the fatted calf! How is that fair?"

The elder son's feelings are mirrored in millions of elder brothers who feel they have been treated unjustly.

But the father's attitude is, "Son, you have been with me. We have shared together, planned together, worked together, laughed together. Meanwhile your brother has been absent from our joy. Look what he has missed, He's been hurt, rejected, shamed. We must try to make it up to him. He's home now, and we need to celebrate."

Many Christians portray a deeply pagan view of the world when they secretly think that the people in the world are the ones who are really enjoying life and having all the fun.

Living with the Father is what heaven is all about.

Those who live in his presence now are tasting, in advance, what heaven will be like.

We are immature if we think we need more reward than his presence, and we are blind to think the sin of the world does not exact its own punishment from which a loving Father wants to redeem us.

The father loved both his sons equally.

Their different needs, however, required of him different expressions of that love.

Wise earthly fathers also seek to be sensitive to the different needs of their children.

The experiences of human fathers can help them enrich their understanding of the heavenly Father.

God cannot allow us to do everything we want to do.

When a young father first has to deny his child a request and is unable to fully explain to the child the reason for his decision, he knows something of the dilemma God faces with his children.

In moments like these, a father learns to be thankful that neither does the heavenly Father give us everything we ask for in prayer.

Indeed, we might pray more often, "Thank you Lord, for not answering the prayer I prayed last year."

God is quiet sometimes because his children aren't ready to listen.

A father held his four-year-old child in his arms.

She was angry and hurt.

She could not understand why he would not let her do what she wanted to do.

He knew he couldn't explain his reasoning in a way she could understand.

So for awhile he just held her as she beat her little hands on his chest.

After a while, she fell asleep, her fury exhausted.

He held her while she slept.

When his little daughter awoke, she looked up and smiled, hugged his neck, said "I love you," and ran off to play.

In that moment, the father understood a little better why the heavenly Father sometimes stays silent in the face of our bitter questions and angry accusations.

We are not ready, maybe not yet able to understand what God would like to say to us.

So he holds on to us and waits.

In his "not letting go," he speaks the most eloquent language of all.

God wants his children to love one another.

God gains great joy and pleasure from the love and attention his children share with one another.

On the other hand, he feels the sharp pain a father feels when his children turn on one another with divisive and bitter emotions.

No wonder we are admonished in the Scriptures to love one another.

When Jesus called God "Father," he helped us to worship God with more understanding.

He also helped us to be better fathers and mothers when he showed how the heavenly Father

cares for his children.

All of us have been born into a natural family.

Most of us have had a human father.

But God also wants us to have a heavenly Father.

He wants to be our Father now and forever.

He wants to help make up for what a human father did not or could not give us.

He wants to build on all the good experiences we have had with fathers to help us know fully how much we are loved.

No matter where you have been or how discouraged you may feel, he is ready to help you become a son or daughter in his glorious, eternal family.

Come home to the Father.

He is waiting to celebrate your home coming.