

# NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Third Sunday after Pentecost – June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (11:11 am)

## FATHER'S LOVE

Psalm 100  
Romans 8:12-17  
Luke 15:11-32

First, to all of you fathers here today: Happy Father's Day! I trust you know what an honor and privilege it is to be a father, to have a son or daughter – or both or several – who share your genes and will carry on your legacy.

It's a tremendous gift and with it, an awesome responsibility. Being a good father is, by far, the greatest opportunity ... and the greatest challenge.

It's hard to nail it down, but I think we can all agree: There's a distinct 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 Father's Day sermon, of course, is the Fifth Commandment:

***“Honor your father and your mother,  
that your days may be long  
in the land which Yahweh your God gives you.”***

*(Exodus 20:5)*

Beyond that I'd like to take a closer look at the relationship we have – or have had – with our fathers. A father's love – however imperfect and rough around the edges – reflects God's love. As Jesus told his disciples,

***“... who is there among you, who,  
if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?  
Or if he asks for a fish, who will give him a serpent?  
If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,  
how much more will your Father who is in heaven  
give good things to those who ask him!”***

*(Matthew 7:9-11)*

I will now ask a question about fathers. I understand though that some of you here, or online, might have had a father that was very far from a good one. Your fatherhood experiences may have been traumatic. We respect that and we pray that God will continue to help you in your healing journey.

But still, today we want to honor fathers who, even imperfectly, tried to fulfill their call. So, here is my question: how would you describe your father?

- *Was 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 the time?*
- *Was he affectionate and demonstrative, or did he keep his distance?*
- *Was he emotionally transparent and easy to read, or was he reserved, keeping his feelings to himself?*
- *Did he read to you when you were little and play with you as you were growing up?*
- *Did he teach you to do things? What sort of 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 and help 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 you and keep you in line, or did he give you the freedom to explore and make your own discoveries ... your own decisions ... and your own mistakes?*

- *If you're a son, was your father someone you wanted to be like when you grew up? If you're 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 the chance, what words of gratitude and affirmation would you most like to share with him today?*

These are just a few of the questions you might ask yourself in describing your father and your relationship with him.

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, it is always time to work on it, asking God for strength to forgive and let go. Ask the Lord to help you focus on what he did for you, or tried to do, and to honor him for who he is.

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, he said if your son 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:

***“Therefore, I tell you, don't be anxious for your life:***

***what you will eat, or what you will drink;***

***nor yet for your body, what you will wear.***

***Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothing?***

***See the birds of the sky, that they don't sow, neither do they reap,***

***nor gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them.***

***Aren't you of much more value than they?”***

*(Matthew 6:25-26)*

Jesus also said:

**“What do you think?**

***If a man has one hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray,  
doesn't he leave the ninety-nine, go to the mountains,***

***and seek that which has gone astray?***

***If he finds it, most certainly I tell you, he rejoices over it more  
then over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray.***

***Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven  
that one of these little ones should perish.”***

*(Matthew 18:12-14)*

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 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 rebel 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 a 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 from you by faith.

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. In Jesus' words,

***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”***

*(John 3:16)*

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. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul writes,

***“For you didn’t receive the spirit of bondage again to fear,  
but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’  
The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God;  
and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ;  
if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him.”***

*(Romans 8:15-17)*

As fathers, 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.

When it’s all said and done, the gift of faith is the greatest gift a father can give his children – to 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. It’s the ultimate expression of a father’s love.

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I would like to finish this message with this true story. The boy’s father joined the pastor at the baptismal font to give his son a blessing. Here’s what he said:

***“Son, today I want to impart a father’s blessing to you as a father myself and as a representative of your Heavenly Father.***

***I bless your life. The life God gave you. He knew you before He created the world. He formed you in your mother’s womb to be exactly who you are, to look as you do, and to have the personality and character you have. You were uniquely***

***crafted and specifically designed for God's purpose. He loves you and wants you to know the height, depth and breadth of His Love for you.***

***I bless your personal faith in Jesus Christ so that you may not only believe what He has said but receive what He has promised for your life. I bless you in your walk with God. Your mother and I pray that you may be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ with your mind bound to His thoughts, your hands bound to His work and your feet bound to His path for your life.***

***I bless the day you were born, the perfect timing of your birth and the destiny that God pre-planned for your life. All the days of your life were ordained before one of them came to be. May you discover the sheer joy of walking in the steps that God has ordered for your life.***

***I bless your gender as a cherished young man of God created in God's perfect design. I bless your birth order. May the timing of your arrival and your relationship with your brother and sisters be used by God to perfect you according to His will.***

***I bless your emotional life so that you may understand deep in your heart that God will always provide a safe place for you, a place of refuge on this earth from the forces that set themselves against you. May God's perfect love displace any fears in your life.***

***SON, know this day that you are a blessed son of the highest God with the same inheritance as that of His Son, Jesus Christ, in Whose name and authority I pronounce this blessing on you today."***