

"A Tale of Three Fathers"

Matthew 10:24-39

June 19, 2005 – Father's Day

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²⁴"A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

²⁶"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³²"Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

³⁶and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Prayer.

I begin today with an apology to the women in attendance. Today's message is directed towards the men and boys in our congregation. You may receive some benefit from it. But that would only be a nice, secondary benefit. Being Father's Day, and as a result of the fact that our Gospel lesson directly addresses the

issue of fathers, I thought it best to address men and boys directly. The title of today's message is "A Tale of Three Fathers."

The first father that I would like you to begin thinking about is the father that God gave you. "Whose your daddy?" would be an irreverent means to ask the question.

Let me tell you a little bit more about the father that Steve and I shared. I was born in mid June, 1961, the fourth of four children to Charles William and Alice Livina Goddard. Dad was a welder when I first was born. My earliest memories of dad were of having him slicking back my hair with Vitalis and taking us to church. For a few years dad worked as an accountant for a large company, but my world turned upside down when he decided to act on a 20 year old call to the ordained ministry and he enrolled into SUNY Fredonia as a freshman at the age of 42.

While dad went to school, he served churches as a local pastor. All of which meant I didn't see much of my father growing up, because he was either doing school work or church work, and it was just mom and me. Steve, Cindy, and Bryan had left for college, leaving just the mom and me behind. When dad was around, I certainly saw flashes of his anger and stubbornness. Though he was a pastor, and, as Wesley would put it, still going on to perfection, mom and I knew that he wasn't there yet. He attended school continually, until he earned his doctorate degree, and died the following year at the age of 59.

When I think of the blessings from my father, I must admit that I have to search hard. He was largely absent in my growing up life. But, the best thing my dad ever gave me was the love of Jesus, and the faith driven devotion to serve the people of Christ's Church.

Think for a moment: is the gift of faith a gift that your father gave to you?

The second father that I'd like to get us thinking about this morning, men and boys, is the father that you are called to be. Now I know not all men will be fathers; but I'm addressing the vast majority who will become, or who are already fathers.

To get you thinking about your own fatherhood, let me tell you a little about myself; my private life, what most people don't see outside of the church. I'm confident that, if given a polygraph test, both my sons would report that I'm a pretty harsh father. I have a temper, and when stressed, I am quick to anger. I'm impatient. I expect good grades, attention to tasks that I ask be completed,

and honesty and kindness in everything you do. I work a lot- a whole lot, and quite often I'm away from home many evenings of the week. Cynthia carries the majority of the parental responsibility in our family; she does the cooking, cleaning, washing, reading, and readying backpacks. When the cry goes out in the middle of the night, I'm the first to admit that I sleep right through it. When there is reading to be done or backpacks to be filled, I'm often nowhere to be found. I must admit there are many times my boys love me and I can't help but silently wonder why.

And I know that I'm not alone.

But if there is one thing that I'm particularly proud of, and I consider it to be my most important obligation as a father, is that I want both my sons to have a love of Jesus, and a faith driven devotion to serve the people of Christ's Church. Nicholas and Christian may grow up to be donut makers and ditch diggers, but it is my fervent prayer that they make donuts and dig ditches for Christ and for His Kingdom.

Dads, think for a moment: is the gift of faith, a gift that you are giving to your children?

The third father I'd like you to think about this morning is our heavenly Father; our God who is in heaven. In our Gospel lesson for this morning, Jesus is teaching his new disciples, picking up the story from last Sunday. He is laying the groundwork for a life dedicated to mission and ministry in the name of Jesus.

"I have come to set a man against his father," Jesus teaches them (10:35). So much for Bible and family values. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me," (10:37). That should just about put Focus on the Family right out of business. What does this mean for Zion, and our huge emphasis on family, church family, and home family?

Jesus, sent by our Father who is in heaven, is forewarning his soon to be Apostles that they are not going to be received in every household. When they preach, teach, heal, cast out demons, and raise the dead in the name of Jesus – when they engage in the work of Christ's ministry – they will be accepted by some, and will be bitterly rejected by others.

And sometimes ... the fault line will divide the family. Just as the Civil War pitted brother against brother and father against son, so too will following Jesus cause families to fracture.

Now there is a happy Father's Day message for you!

What our heavenly Father is recognizing is the fact that salvation can not come through the institution of family. We may have a family filled with love and warmth, but not one of us are able to prevent our parents from dying. We may have a wonderful 50 plus year marriage, filled with kindness and commitment, but that isn't going to keep your spouse or you from dying. We might love our own children to the ends of the universe, but there isn't one of us who can prevent one accident or illness from taking their life prematurely.

The means to salvation doesn't come through the family. The means to salvation can only come through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and through a relationship we are to develop throughout our lives with our heavenly Father.

This is not in any way, shape, or form, an effort to degrade the institution or value of family. It is, however, a call to place family in it's proper perspective.

Families are fragile and easily broken.

I don't believe we adore families quite so much as we say we do. If we worshiped the family like some would have us believe, juvenile hall wouldn't be filled with throw-away kids. The divorce rate wouldn't be as high as it is. And our elderly wouldn't be forgotten in nursing homes.

Family is a loving gift from God, to be appreciated for in the moment. When your child cuddles into your lap, return love in the moment. When you son takes you to his baseball game, fold your arms and smile in satisfaction, in the moment. When your daughter comes home from school celebrating a great achievement, rejoice and take lots of pictures of the moment, because ... all we have is the moment.

The only thing that endures is our Father's love for us. God has been the perfect Father to each of us, the ideal, the model, the highest example of a wonderful father. Each and every one of us fall short; but our heavenly Father has claimed us as His own, remained faithfully by our side – even from generation to generation, and all He asks for in return is faith the size of a mustard seed.

Whether you are a man or a woman, a male or a female, know that you've been adopted by God. You were an orphan and lost to the wages of sin and death. But God has adopted you. The one who created you in His image, has taken you in.

You've been claimed by a heavenly Father who loves you; who loves you so much, that He sent us His Son, that whosoever believes in Him will have everlasting life.

I pray that it was the faith of a father that brought you into the Church, that, like me, warmed your heart to Christ, and to work for the establishment of His heavenly Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.

Listen up, all you dads. I pray that you would find somewhere within yourself, despite all your shortcomings, that, like myself, you might be able to instill within your children the love of Jesus with a deep rooted faith.

Listen up, beloved Church; on this Father's Day, give thanks for our Heavenly Father; for His love, His faithfulness, and for His salvation.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.