

Sermon Preached on  
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
(June 19, 2016)  
"Father of All"

If I am a little bleary-eyed, forgive me. Our son went out with friends and did not return until 1:00 AM. Now, he's a college student, so you have to expect these things. And when he's away at college, I have no idea how late he gets home or what he's doing. But when he's here, well, we worry. That's what being a parent is about. And what a perfect day for it because of course, it's Father's Day. So, did you think about your dad today? If he's alive, did you get him a card or a call? Are you cooking out? Just like we did last month with Mother's Day, it's good to remember your parents who help you become the smart, charming person you are today. Right?

But you know, the day is also great for Fathers (as it was last month for Mothers) to think about what they're doing as parents. To think about what it means to be a parent. Because to become a parent -- whew -- that's no light thing.

You give up the right to sleep. My mother says she still worries. You have to move slower so your kids can keep up - and then all the sudden you can't keep up. You have to guide them and hope you're not messing it up. You have to let them make mistakes and, yes, put themselves in danger.

I don't know how often I watched my son climb a tree, getting a hundred feet up till the tree just starts to bend - always with my heart in my throat. I don't know how many times we've taken one or the other to doctor for a broken bone, a sprain, a torn this or that...

But you know, then you look at that baby, or that precocious child, or that brilliant and kind young man or woman, and you have this incredible love that makes everything right with the world.

And it was when I became a father that I finally understood why we call God "Father." Mother works, too, because God has no limits, but it's Father's Day, so....

It was the first time I looked at my infant son and understood - wow - if God loves us half as much as I love this kid - this is a God I want to be with. And I do believe the term "Father" for God - Parent if you will - is well chosen. That's why Jesus refers to God as Father so often - that's the kind of love God has for us. And what kind of father is God?

Well, our lessons speak to fatherhood and God pretty well. Sure, you may not think of Elijah as Father's Day material, but think of this. Elijah is on the run from King Ahab who wants to kill him. Elijah climbs up to the mountain and screams at God: "I do what you want, and this is what I get? Answer me!" Then, there is a horrible wind storm, strong enough to split mountains. But the voice of God is not there. Following that is a raging fire. But the voice of God isn't there. There's an earthquake, but no voice of God.

Finally, there is silence - and a still small voice speaks.

As a parent, one of the things I've learned is that yelling and screaming never works. It'll terrify your kids, but it won't get the results you want (unless you like terrified kids). I also learned that being the biggest and best at everything doesn't really mean all that much. Rather, often what a kid needs is a quiet, calm presence. It's in the calm, "Let's consider what just happened here," that lessons are learned and love is grown.

Same is true for God. Sometimes, like any parent, the best lessons are learned in silence or in quiet. All we have to do is listen.

Or how about our Gospel. I know, pigs and demons aren't really what the dads had in mind today. BUT, think of what is going on. Jesus encounters a sick man - whatever the demon was, it's bad. The demons say, "Send us into those pigs over there and not into the abyss." Jesus does so, and the pigs immediately drown themselves. Now, the swineherds run away when they see this, and they're afraid. But afraid of what? In all the healings that Jesus performs in the gospels, where else are people afraid of him? Annoyed sometimes, sure, but afraid? So, what are they afraid of? Well, these pigs are their business. They've just lost 5,000 pigs, which is a lot of money. Does it matter to them that they have regained the health of one man when they've lost money?

But to God, the one man is more important than the money. To a parent, you know that if your child is sick, you will give what it takes to heal that child. The love you share is greater than all the money in the world.

And here's where Paul's letter to the Galatians comes in. Now, this letter is not his most cheerful. Frankly, he's angry at the Galatians. But then he says, "You are all children of God...There is no longer Jew or Greek." We are all children of God. We are all loved insanely by God. Conversely, God is father to us all. And if you ever had brothers or sisters - or if you're a parent with more than one child, you know this question will inevitably come up: "Who do you love more?"

Parents, you know the answer: I love you all equally because you're all different but wonderful. Hard enough to imagine with a few kids - God's got 7 billion. But that's just more family to love.

Love doesn't diminish when it's given - it grows.

So Happy Father's Day. If you're a dad, remember what it's like to love someone so much. And then remember that that's God, who is the Father of us all. Amen.