



6/21/2020

“One God and Father of All”

Scripture: Psalm 24:1-2, 95:1-2; Luke 3:21-23, 38 (15:1-32); Ephesians 4:1-6

Third Sunday after Pentecost

Father’s Day – Christian Home Month

Theme: Acknowledging God as heavenly Father of all people encourages us to a life of worship and praise to God and greater love for all people, beginning with our family of faith.

Ephesians 4:1-6 “I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.**”

Today once again we celebrate Father’s Day in our country and elsewhere, “honoring and celebrating fatherhood, paternal bonds, and the influence of fathers in society,” according to Wikipedia,) “. . . also celebrated widely on other days, . . . created to complement Mother’s Day.”

Throughout our United Methodist Connection, and I am sure in other churches as well, we especially acknowledge and “honor the father’s role in the Christian family, the community and the world.” (UMC Calendar) With it, we conclude our observance of Christian Home Month, which you may recall we began on Mother’s Day. Christian homes, as most or all others this year, have been especially challenged and stretched in various ways and for various reasons.

Traditionally and biblically, we may think mostly in terms of a father’s love in providing security, protection, strength, food or other provisions, wisdom, instruction, guidance and discipline. But dads are also hopefully affectionate, comforting, supporting, encouraging and even fun to be around.

In today’s world of “flexible” roles and responsibilities, dad’s often share household chores and taking care of children while mom is out at work on the job. So, we are thankful for good fathers and fatherly men in our lives, even their peculiarities and individual personalities and ways of looking at things.

When I read and reflect upon Paul’s words to the early church in Ephesus, I think about my own earthly father. Although he was Jewish, he acknowledged God’s love and power in Jesus. And most of all, he admired and respected Christ’s teaching and way of life, as expressed by Paul’s words as well.



† **But today, I also want us to acknowledge our spiritual heavenly father – God.**

Last week we considered Paul's prayer to the Ephesians, which acknowledged God as "the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name." (Ephesians 3:14-15)

As The Interpreter's Bible points out, the Greek word translated family here (patria) "means a group such as a clan or tribe, even a nation, which claims descent from a common ancestor (father)." (Abingdon Press, 1952, p.676) It goes on to say that "the thought here is not that God is the Father of all, but rather that he is the prototype of all fatherhood." Yet I would say that while Paul may be writing specifically to Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity as now being one family in Christ, the bible here and elsewhere also gives a much broader perspective. The Greek word translated as "every" by most bibles means just that – every family, tribe, people and nation.

The physical lineage of Jesus, as it was thought through Joseph, was given in Luke's account all the way back to Adam, the first human being, who is referred to as "**the son of God.**" (Luke 3:38) This of course refers to Adam, as well as Eve, being made by God "in the image and likeness of God." (Genesis 1:26-27) God in this sense is the Father of all humankind. However, humankind willfully disobeyed God and fell into sin, bringing with it all kinds of evil thoughts, feelings and actions between people in or of the same or differing families, tribes, nations, races, color or other ways we use to group us together or separate us apart. Just look though the Bible from Genesis on to see the great story of humankind in this regard.

As The Interpreter's Bible does go on to say, "(God's) relation to his children is the pattern of all other social relationships. The fellowship of race or nation or of natural kin in any grouping is but a shadow, under the limited conditions inherent in any form of created existence, of the eternal fellowship of the children of God with the one Father of them all, and with one another." (Ibid.) "The earthly families which the writer has in mind are the nations, which commonly ascribed their unity to descent from a common ancestor" as found in the bible and in the folklore of other peoples. . .

It further states that "Somewhat loosely the term is extended to the angelic hierarchies, as 'families' in heaven." James, the brother of the Lord Jesus, declared that, "**Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.**" (James 1:17 NIV)

† **Even as stars and angels – the "heavenly lights" – sing and shine in heaven praising God, so we do well in praising God in worship and through our lives.** It does not matter as much how well we may carry a tune, as it does to use the gifts God has given each of us.

And while we may not presently be able to gather in worship and praise as we are accustomed, we can still praise and worship God in other ways, as we did on the lawn of Town Point Church this past Wednesday. And I'm glad to see continued use of social media to uplift others with



song and praise.

Wherever we are, even by ourselves in isolation, we can praise the God of all creation and life, here and everlasting. It is most interesting that one of the things people with dementia hold onto the longest are familiar hymns and songs. That could well be, because they have deep and strong feelings and memories associated with them, as well as sound and words linked together.

So, think of how you feel led and moved to praise God. And let yourself express those thoughts and feelings to God and others!

The bible and our faith affirm that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God – that is, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of a woman. Paul’s intention, as he expresses it here to the believers in Ephesus, is that they, as part of God’s family redeemed by Jesus Christ, “lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” (4:1)

That life is demonstrated, Paul says, “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (4:2-3) These attributes or characteristics will affect every area and aspect of our lives.

I could go on to unpack each of these words, qualities and characteristics as we have before with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. For now, though, my hope is that you will join me in taking each one in prayer and meditation during the week – perhaps one each day – and **reflect upon ways in which the Holy Spirit is working in you and through you to bring you to the perfect image of God as in Jesus Christ**, who said of himself, *“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”* (John 14:9 NIV)

Consider the “Parable of the Prodigal Son” found in Luke 15, perhaps better called the “Parable of the Loving Father.” Jesus himself is not in the parable he uses to describe the forgiving love of the father, who declares his repentant wayward son as “found” and “alive” when he returns home with humility and thankfulness. Yet the life and love of Jesus himself may be seen in our heavenly Father’s approach to run and greet his returning son or daughter with open arms and celebration.

† **It’s also good to remember that as much as we look up to our earthly fathers, they too need love.**

On a day that we especially remember to honor our fathers, as well as look to our faith, perhaps the words of Paul to the Corinthians come to mind. In speaking of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he says, *“These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”* - 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV)

David Smith shared this story with readers of The Upper Room this past week.

“When I was 14 years old, my father was in a serious car accident and suffered a traumatic brain injury. Some days he could barely walk, because he was in severe pain. His recovery took



10 years. This was a difficult time for my family, since our primary provider could no longer work. Life changed for all of us.

“One night when I was 16, my dad was in his room alone. For some reason, I thought that he could use an act of love. I believe now that God directed me. I walked into his room, told him that I loved him, and embraced him. I held my father for several minutes, and tears rolled down his cheeks. At the time, I didn’t know what I had done for him. I didn’t know the pain and depression he was going through, the worthlessness he felt, or that he was feeling tempted by thoughts of suicide. To this day, my dad cherishes that embrace and thanks me for it.

“Over the years, my dad and I have told many others about that special moment. We may never know the full impact of that one embrace. God showed me that even the smallest act of love can change a life forever.

“Heavenly Father,” he prays, “thank you for loving us as your children. Guide us to show love to those who need it. Amen.” (*David Smith, US, A Loving Embrace, The Upper Room, 6/18/20*)

For as Paul wrote, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.**”

As we live our lives, may we be able to see the divine image in each person. As we live our lives, may we see Jesus in each person. As we live our lives, may we acknowledge the Spirit of life, of God, which makes us one, and live with the love of God!

And may all who have ears to hear and eyes to see ever be blessed in the knowledge and love of God, our Heavenly Father. In Jesus’ name. Amen.