



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

June 19, 2016

“Fatherhood: Human and Divine”

(Gal. 4:6)

Rev. David K. Groth

“Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal. 4:6).

COLLECT: O God, You have prepared for those who love You such good things as surpass our understanding. Cast out all sins and evil desires from us, and pour into our hearts Your Holy Spirit to guide us into all blessedness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

As the title indicates, this sermon is about Fatherhood, human and divine. I had planned on it being one seamless and smooth flowing sermon, but it wasn't to be. So, here goes: a sermon with two parts and a rather jagged, abrupt, and artless hit the wall transition in between. Part A: Human Fatherhood. Part B: God as our Father.

What does it mean to be a father in our society? Thankfully, I get to think about my dad, who was generous and loving and fun to be around. He had a good mind for business and a big heart for little kids. When we had to get up early in the morning for a vacation or for Easter Sunrise, dad would wake us up by cranking the stereo and playing Copeland's "Fanfare for the Common Man" or a Bach Tocatta and Fugue. At Christmas when we were young dad would invite us to lay down underneath the Christmas tree, looking up through the lights and ornaments. And when we worked together outside planting trees dad would whistle hymns while breathing in and out – his favorite hymns. He loved to compete at everything and though he tried, he was not always humble in victory or gracious in defeat. He wasn't perfect, but he was a really good dad.

When I think of what a father is, I'm blessed to think of him, and hopefully you are equally blessed to think of your father. But a staggering number of children in America, approaching 50% now, go to sleep each night in fatherless homes. Many of them have no fatherly role models other than those they see, for example, on the T.V. sitcoms who are mostly clueless idiots. And in the movies men are tough, they don't show feelings, they're loners, they drink lots of beer and have sex with lots of different women

and are mostly incommunicative. They sort things out with guns and fists.

The model of manhood fostered by popular American isn't working very well for us, and fathers who walk away from fatherhood are a real problem in our society. We talk of "unwed mothers" but what about "unwed fathers" . . . isn't that just as much a part of the problem? What would happen if mothers abandoned children at the rate that fathers do? A woman who leaves a newborn in the hospital and never returns for it still makes newspaper headlines. You'd need a pretty thick book to list the men who have no idea where or how many or who their children are. Fathers who walk away are a real problem in our society. The absence of a father usually causes psychological damage and dysfunction in children. It's a life-long burden of knowing your father didn't really care.

And instead of addressing the problem, society seems to be embracing. Today fathers are thought of more as an optional accessory in the modern family. They are superfluous. In the movie "The Switch" Jennifer Aniston plays an attractive 40-year old professional who has given up on finding Mr. Right for marriage and decides instead to move straight into motherhood with a donor father. This and other movies like it are pushing the idea that children turn out all right with "donor dads" rather than a flesh and blood father in the house. Plenty of academics have also been arguing that single mothers can do just as well raising children with donor dads as they can with real ones. In her book, "Raising Boys Without Men" Cornell psychologist Peggy Drexler claims that all that is needed for parental success is a "caring and supportive" mother. But that view keeps running into trouble with the research. Adult offspring of single-mothers-by-choice were 177% more likely to report having had trouble with drugs and alcohol than children born to two biological parents, and 146% more likely to report having been in trouble with the law before age 25.

So, despite the latest propaganda in favor of a father-optional future, the research suggests two stubborn truths: 1.) Children long to know their dads. 2.) And children are much more likely to thrive when they have a mother and a father in their lives.

Fathers, you are not superfluous. You matter a great deal. Your children are at risk without you. Your responsibility for them is what God has in mind. For men – all of us, fathers or not fathers, husbands or unmarried, young or very old, the word is: the children need us. All of us. The little boys and little girls need our nurture, our care, our provision, our protection, and our demonstration of what it is to be a God-pleasing man. You are not an optional accessory in the American family.

But how does it feel to be a man these days in America? Most, even those who are the primary caregivers for their children, will likely tell you they feel blamed, demeaned and attacked. So today, on Father’s Day, if you had (or have now) the blessing of a good dad, thank God for him. And let’s try to lift up again God’s plan for marriage, and for moms and dads working together to nurture the children. So much for Part A. Now on to divine fatherhood.

In our text, Paul writes, “In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” Now don’t get bent out of shape by the use of the masculine “sons” rather than the neutral “children”. First, this is what the text says and we are not entitled to tinker with it by making it gender neutral. Second, this is an honorific title once reserved only for God’s people Israel. Being called sons of God in this text is something all of us, male and female, can give thanks and praise. In Exodus 4, God says, “Israel is my firstborn son.” Matthew 2:15 says, “Out of Egypt I called my son” the people of Israel. In spite of their wickedness, God makes himself the Father of the nation, and thinks of that people as his son. The whole people of Israel, but only the people of Israel, was regarded as God’s son. Now hear this Good News: in Christ this designation now belongs to us. In spite

of our wickedness we are now sons of God. How does this happen? Verse 27, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” His innocence becomes ours. Luther said, “Christ Himself is our garment . . . the garment of our righteousness and salvation” (AE 26:353).

Paul continues. Therefore, “In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” It doesn’t matter if you have Jewish heritage or Greek, whether you were born a slave or a free person. It even doesn’t matter whether you are a male or female. In Christ Jesus you are all one. “And if you are Christ’s, then you are . . . heirs according to the promise.” So what was once reserved for the people of Israel is now given us in Christ. Ethnic, social, sexual identities do not determine your standing before God. All who are baptized into Christ are one with Him. Clearly then, in this congregation all are to be welcomed, whatever their background or place in life.

Paul goes on: When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman. Notice, Paul doesn’t mention Mary by name here. In fact, Paul doesn’t mention Mary by name in any of his books. Jesus was the focus of his theology and devotion. Paul continues, Jesus “was born under the law to redeem those under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.” The term here that Paul uses for adoption is a Roman legal term signifying the granting of the full rights and privileges of sonship in a family to which one does not belong by birth. Through baptism, God has legally adopted you as a son.

“Now”, Paul continues, “because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” Again, don’t let 21st century sensitivities get in the way of the Good News of this text. In the first century Roman world, if you were the first born son, you were the heir. In baptism God has made us all first-born sons, therefore all heirs. In Romans 8, Paul calls us co-heirs with Christ. With Jesus, we too can cry “Father!” We too can use that intimate name “Abba” or “Daddy” as we address Almighty God.

Remember how Jesus taught us to pray. He didn't reserve the use of Father for himself alone. No, he put the words into our mouths: "Our Father who are in heaven. . . ." He gladly and graciously shares his status as the only rightful heir with us. Now we too are rightful heirs.

Finally, in verse 7, Paul concludes, "So you are no longer a slave [slave to sin and death] but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." Paul had been using 1st person plural. "You are all sons" . . . all of you. Now he shifts to 1st person singular. Through baptism into Christ, God now considers you (you singular, you as an individual) to be his heir. What remarkable grace! What remarkable generosity!

You know, if you were born into a large family, (maybe having five or six siblings), that can be a wonderful childhood. But one of the drawbacks is there probably won't be much of an inheritance. First, it took all the money mom and dad had just to get all of you dressed, fed, educated, married and out the door. Second, by the time the estate is divided between all your siblings, there probably won't be much left. In fact, it might work the other way around. Because they're flat broke you and your siblings might be paying their bills after their life's end. We all do well not to count on an inheritance as part of our retirement plans.

However, being heirs of God, I don't think that will be much of a problem. That's an inheritance we can count on to meet all our needs. That's an inheritance that is not divided or watered down by sharing it with others. God graciously takes care of us in this life, and even more so in the next, when he will pull out all the stops.

So, the message is, by baptism you are one with Christ, and therefore God's Son, and an heir according to promise. This was once reserved for God's Old Testament people. Now, by grace, it's a designation that belongs to us all. We all get to think of God as our Father. We can all address him even as "Abba!"

Remember those words "Father, Abba." Especially when you feel most sinner, when the Law thunders like it did at Sinai, when you're broken and clean out of options.

Remember what the prodigal son said? “I will return to my Father.”

And remember how the Father embrace him, welcomed him, celebrated his return. Likewise, John writes, “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 Jn. 3:1). Amen.

