Sermon | Proper 7C

TEXT: Gal. 4:4—7

19 June 2016

*Father*

*In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.*

Dear saints,

Today is Father’s Day. And so happy Father’s Day to all the dads in the congregation. We’re sorry that we do not have carnations for you. Something tells me the men in the congregation won’t really mind.

We have these two cultural holidays, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. It seems to be that out of the two, it’s Father’s Day that often takes a back seat to Mother’s Day in our celebrating. When we look at the condition of our culture and society today, it seems there isn’t a more important or relevant topic than that we Christian men understand fatherhood? What does it mean when God is calling me to be father? What is the vocation of fatherhood all about anyway?

There is a verse in St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 3:15, where St. Paul says, “*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father…by whom all fatherhood…is named*.” Those of you that are dads, fathers, why are you called fathers in the first place? Answer: you are named after your father in heaven. You’re to do in your vocation, office, station in life, what your heavenly Father done for you. When we consider our Father in heaven, what is it that your heavenly Father done for you? That he gave his only begotten Son. When we, his wayward children turned our backs to him, it was our Father in heaven who remained faithful to us, by sending his Son to redeem us, so that we might be reconciled, have life forever with him.

So as earthly fathers named after our heavenly Father, what greater work can we do then to give our children Jesus? Then to bring our families up in the knowledge of salvation? That we bring our children to Church, pray at home, read the catechism at home, teach the Scriptures. And when we do that, we’re modeling for our children what it means to be father. We’re living toward our families, as our heavenly Father lives toward us—in giving them Jesus. Because our Father in heaven has given Jesus to us.

And so in honor of Father’s Day, I’d like for us to consider three things about our Father in heaven: [welcome] our Father in heaven is close, caring, and consistent.

1. The first thing we can say about our heavenly Father is that he is **close**. And the verse is from Gal. 4:6: “*Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father*!’” What St. Paul is talking about is that, by Holy Baptism, we are the adopted sons and daughters of God. And as sons of God, we’ve been given access to God in prayer. We’ve been given the Holy Spirit, by whom we can call upon God in all things, knowing that he hears us. Because he is our Father.

And the picture here is kind of like, the difference between when a telemarketer calls, versus when your son calls. You know that, if you pick up the phone, and it’s a telemarketer, you’re going to treat entirely differently than you would if it was your child who called you. Growing up, my friend’s dad was really good at impersonations. If a poor salesperson called they might have to suffer through one of these impersonations. But for most of us, we just hang up the phone.

And yet, when your kid calls, it’s an entirely different story. They get your full an undivided attention. You hear their concerns. You’re ready to help them in their trouble. And so it is with God. Our Father in heaven is close. Not only does he hear our prayers. But he delights in our prayers. And like most earthly fathers, what he doesn’t like is when you stop calling him. Because he loves to hear from you.

One of places of the Scriptures which speaks of this closeness that we have with our Father in heaven is Psalm 139. Psalm 139 is all about how God knows us intimately and personally, better than anyone else in our life. The Psalmist says, “*You knit me together in my mother’s womb*.” There, when we were just a tiny clump of cells, just the smallest embryo in our mother’s womb, you were there, forming me and crafting me according to your image, so that the Psalmist can say, “*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*.” And then throughout our lives, he is close to us. The Psalmist says, “Where can I even go from your presence? If I fly up to heaven like a bird, you are there. If I make my bed in the ground, you are there. Far from being a distant deity, or an uncaring creator, our God is a close God, close to us as fathers are to their children.

But of course, there are some of you, who might not be able to connect to this idea of closeness with your Father in heaven. Maybe you grew up with an absentee father, did know your father. Maybe your dad was there, but just not there for you—a now show, out with friends, on a business trip, or disconnected. Maybe you have a hard time understanding closeness because you never experienced that yourself. Just remember that where earthly fathers fail, God the Father never fails. He’s perfect and holy. And so, God your Father is always accessible, present, fully engaged with you. Our Father in heaven is close.

2. The second thing we can say about our heavenly Father is that he is **caring**. The verse is Psalm 103:13: “*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him*.”

Not only is your Father in heaven close. He is caring. He provides for you. Not only your daily bread. But everything you need for this body and life. What are the kind of things that he provides? Here the catechism helps: clothing, shoes, food, drink, house, home, wife, children, land, animals, all that I have. He daily and richly provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.

We know how easy it is for us to lose sight of this. How easy it is to forget that we have a Father in heaven who cares, when things get tough. If you find yourself in a tough financial situation, or if your employment is a little iffy, you don’t know where your next paycheck is coming from—you know how easy it is to worry. How am I going to put bread on the table? How am I going to clothe my children? How am I going to make ends meet? How am I going to provide for myself and my family?

We’re prone to worry. We’re prone to anxiety. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses this. He asks us to consider two things in nature: flowers and birds. Look at the birds, Jesus says, they don’t work like you do, sow, reap, gather into barns, punch a time clock, sweat, stress, strive—and yet, your heavenly Father feeds them. He cares for them. How much more does he care for you?

And then, consider the grass of the field. Flower don’t get dressed, put on clothes, do their make up or their hair, or fuss about getting pretty the way we do. But look: the lilies of the field are grander than Solomon in all his glory. If God clothes the grass which is alive today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith?

The result of believing that we have a Father in heaven who cares for us is, we don’t have to worry. We don’t have to sit here wondering, “What shall I eat, drink, wear?” The Gentiles worry about all these things. But your Father in heaven knows that you need them all. He is a caring God. He’s got our daily bread covered. He’s got eternal life covered. So don’t worry.

3. The third thing we can say about our heavenly Father is that he is **consistent**. And the verse here is James 1:17, “*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change*.” No variation with God. No shadow of changing with God. God doesn’t change. God stays the same, even if everything else around us in our world and in our lives is changing. It makes me think of a hymn we sing, mostly on Wednesdays because it is an evening hymn, “Abide With Me.” And the verse that says, “*Change and decay in all around I see. O thou who changest not, abide with me*.” God doesn’t change. God is consistent.

Maybe you could say the same thing about your dad. Dads tend to be creatures of habit, consistency. If he wore the same tie every Christmas or ask to go to the same restaurant, ordered the same dinner of liver and onions on his birthday. Growing up, you could easily set your watch by my dad’s schedule. In fact, every day after school, my dad’s car would pull up at 3:42 pm. I knew that if his car wasn’t there at 3:42, a meteor must’ve hit the earth or some other disaster must’ve happened. Because he was never late.

It’s the same for God. God is consistent. This is good news. Think all the way back to the Fall into Sin, Genesis 3. Remember what God says to the serpent who tempted Adam and Eve to sin? “The seed of the woman shall crush your head. You shall strike his heel.” What’s that mean? It’s the promise of Jesus. Who is the one who crushes the serpent’s head? It’s the Son of God, who defeats Satan at the cross, by paying for our sins, reconciling us to God. And by his death, Satan’s power is destroyed. And, “you will strike his heel,” that is, you will crucify him and kill him. But by his death, he will destroy you of your power. All the way back, thousands of years before Jesus came, God the Father was promising a Savior.

And because God is consistent, doesn’t change, he keeps his promise, he doesn’t change his mind. You can open every page of the Old Testament, read any of the prophets, and find the promise of Jesus. “He’s coming, the Savior is coming.” And then—St. Paul’s words today—“*when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive adoption as sons*.” The Son of God is born, to stand under the Law for us, keeping it perfectly in every way, for us, suffering it’s punishment, for us, so that we might receive adoption as sons of God, in our Baptism. And God does it, because he is consistent. He keeps his promises.

The result of believing that our God is a close, caring, consistent Father in heaven is, boldness and confidence in prayer. Remember what Luther says in the Catechism? What is the Introduction to the Lord’s Prayer? *Our Father who art in heaven.* What does this mean? “*With these words, God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask him as dear children ask their dear Father*.”

We don’t have to wonder, if God loves us, close to us, or cares for us. We don’t have to wonder when we pray, if God is listening and answering. We have that answer from the Scriptures. Our Father in heaven is all these things because of what Christ has done for us. In him, our adoption as sons is secure.

*In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit*. Amen.