***“My Father and Your Father”*** by Stephen Finlan at The First Church, Easter, 4-21-19

**John 20:1–18**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple. . . . 5The other disciple bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6Then Simon Peter went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed. . . .

11 As Mary wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” 14When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” 16Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew,”Rabbouni!” (which means “my Teacher”). 17Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” 18Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord.”

Matthew and Luke both speak of Jesus appearing to the women as a group. Apparently prior to that was his appearance to Mary Magdalene alone, which appears only in John. John goes into depth, showing Mary’s feelings and her experience, step by step.

But first it talks about the two most famous male apostles. It describes Peter and John running to the tomb. John looks into the tomb and sees the linen wrappings lying there, but he doesn’t go in. The impetuous Peter goes in, sees the linen wrappings, and also the cloth that had covered his head. Interesting that the author pays so much attention to two pieces of cloth, almost as though those details will become important later. If one of them is the Shroud of Turin, it is only important enough to mention in passing, but not to dwell upon. No one’s faith is really based on the Shroud’s existence.

Then the gospel says that John went into the tomb, “and he saw and he believed” (20:8). This is so important to the author of the Gospel of John, who is probably a disciple of John’s. It is crucial for this author to say that John believed—which probably means believing that Jesus rose from the dead—before Peter believed. The author says they had not yet connected the facts with a Scripture that said that he must rise from the dead. The only scripture that seems possible is the one in the prophet Hosea: “Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him” (Hos 6:1–2).

Hosea, in his own day and age, is speaking about people feeling crushed and defeated, then being lifted up and revived by God. Christians, reflecting upon the Resurrection, recalled this passage, and saw it as prophetic. The Resurrection is astonishing, and unprecedented, and they could not help being astonished when they re-read a passage that seemed to foretell it.

But what is most amazing and important in the gospel story is Jesus’ remark, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (20:17). In a way, he is placing Mary on the same level as himself. The Father is *her* Father as much as God is *his* Father. God is *her* God as much as *his*. But the word Father is even more important than the word God, because it conveys the intimacy and the warmth that Jesus reveals about God, who is not *just* God, but *Father*. And in that warm and close connection, there is a similarity between the Divine Son’s relation to the Father, and your or my relation to the Father. At least in potential, we can make God our trusted leader and teacher and guide, just as Jesus did. Of course, it makes us better people, even better fathers or mothers.

Despite the obvious and huge differences between Jesus and ourselves, there is this similarity, that we both can look up to God, the First Source, and call him father . . . or mother, if you prefer. There are certain advantages to calling God “father,” though. It has an instructive influence on fathers. It suggests that being a father is a sacred trust.

There is a positive side to thinking of God parentally, either as father or mother because it can build upon good memories of love and support one has received. But calling God “father” can fill a void for those who have a void where their father experience should be, or have heartache in that area. “Father” as a term for God can be *reparative*. It can create a new relationship unlike any that one has had. In fact, God is the one *wholly* and *infinitely* reliable parent. And God becomes the ideal to which all fathers should strive. All the major religions, when they are healthy, socialize men and lead them to become better fathers. But the religion of Jesus *especially* does this. The religion of Jesus shows us a father’s love and intimacy.

Notice that I am saying “the religion of Jesus” here, to focus on Jesus’ life, his attitude, and his own unique religious experience. When he says “my Father,” you know that he is drawing upon a lifetime of prayer, trusting, and communing with God. Then, when he says “*your* Father,” he is letting us know that we can have that intimate religious experience, too. That is his greatest revelation: his life itself—his trust, as he practiced it. Aside from the *teaching*, there is the *living*, the faith and good will that he always showed. I am personally grateful for Jesus saying “my Father and your Father,” because it shows that the Father is not out of reach. Infinite knowledge and power are, obviously, out of my reach, but a child-like relationship to my spiritual Father is not out of reach.

He offers reassurance to me, just as he reassured Mary when he said to her “Mary!” and she recognized him at that moment. I recognize Jesus when I see his love, and his continuing demonstration that we can perceive God as a loving father. Whether our relationship to our own fathers was wonderful, or complicated and mixed, we have a Divine Father who will guide us, and afterward receive us into glory.

All of this contributes to your life here and now. As you build your relationship with the Father, you then bring spiritual values into your earth family. You bring a certain peace and surety into your family, too. And of course it helps to know that “Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed!”