

Sermon 062115 Fatherhood  
Scripture- 1Timothy 5: 8, Ephesians 6: 4  
Sermon Title- The Father

Happy Fathers Day! I'd like to begin with one of my favorite fatherhood stories. Harmon Killebrew, the Hall of Fame slugger from the Minnesota Twins, told this story about his own dad. Harmon and his two brothers were playing football with their dad in the back yard of their house. His mom yelled out the kitchen window at his dad, "You are ruining the lawn!" His dad shot back, "We're not raising grass, we're raising boys!"

Now, I plan on giving some pastoral advice on fatherhood in this sermon. This might be an opportunity for you to question my credibility, as I have never been a dad. You can say, 'who does he think he is? He's giving advice on being a father to actual dads without ever having done it.' I'll take that hit. I know many people question Catholic Priest's ability to do marriage counseling for the same reason. There is a point to that idea, I won't argue with it. I will say however that I have been a son of a dad. I have also observed fathering quite a bit and I believe that I can recognize good fathering and poor fathering. I'd like to think that I can bring something to the discussion, but you can be the judge.

I read a book years ago named *Iron John* by Robert Bly. It spoke of how fatherhood and even manhood are the subjects of myth in modern times. In primitive societies a boy went from his

‘mother’s house’ to his ‘father’s house.’ The boy, when young would stay close to mother while dad and the other tribal men would go off on the hunt. Then, when the boy was ready, dad would wake him up early and say, come with me. The boy would go on the hunt, learn the skills needed, see how men related to each other and how they view the women, and the world. He has an intimate and detailed schooling on how to be a man. The same was true when the family farm came into being.

Then, with the arrival of the industrial revolution, dad went off to work and the boy would never have the chance to be imprinted with manhood with any detail. He would see dad come home tired from work and not have the quality time with dad. Boys growing up could only imagine what manhood and fatherhood are. Generation after generation has lacked a shoulder-to-shoulder relationship with their dads. So, manhood and fatherhood become the stuff of myth and imagination with only a little real information to work from. Sure, there are dads who spend much time with their boys hunting, fishing, building and fixing things, coaching ball games, leading in scouts and such, but in the main, fatherhood and manhood is the stuff of myth.

Things have even changed dramatically from the paradigm that I grew up in, with dad the breadwinner and mom caring for the

house and kids. Although much of the thinking on the parts of men remain the same.

Lets face it; men still largely gain their identity from their job. It is a source of pride to be the provider. The truth is, that not only dual incomes are now the norm, but also many wives earn more than their husbands. What does that do to the family dynamic and to the psyche of the man? Plenty. It is a very different game now and it shows. Men now share in household chores that were considered women's work not all that long ago. Men not only have a changed profile in the household but also changed roles in the raising of the kids. 'Working women' is only one of the societal changes to effect men's roles as husband, dad, and contributor to the household. It's all-different now and there is no updated owners manual.

I think it is time to reclaim fatherhood. I'm not saying go back to the past. We can't do that. I'm saying that there is a new freedom to define fatherhood in our times that can work for the father, the mother, and most importantly, the kids.

Rev. John Drescher wrote a book called "If I Were Starting My Family Again." In it, he shares eight things that he would do differently if he could go through his years of being a father all over again. I think they are instructive. Here is what Drescher wrote:

1. “First of all, if I could do it all over again, I would love my wife more, because by loving my wife more, I would create an environment of security in our home. Our love would be something they could see- something they would never have to worry about.”
2. “Second, I would laugh more. I would relax and enjoy my children and laugh at their antics. I would spend more time with them and enjoy being a father.”
3. “Third, I would present a more realistic model for them to follow. I would be honest with them about myself. I would let them know that I had problems in school, too, that I stumbled, and made mistakes, and failed. I would let them know that I understand, and that they can come to me when they fail, because I have been there as well.”
4. “Fourth, I would listen to what they say. I would listen to their pains and problems and worries and concerns. I would listen when they wanted to talk to me, because now I realize that if I listen to them when they are small, and to their little problems, then when they are big, and have big problems, they will still come and talk with me.”

5. “Fifth, I would stop praying so much for my family, and start praying more for myself, because a father’s prayers so often sound something like this, ‘God, make my son and daughter good people. Help them succeed in school. Help them to find the right person to marry. Take care of them and protect them’ We’re always praying for them, it seems. But I would start praying more for myself, that when I become the right kind of father, my children will probably be the right kind of children.”
6. Sixth, I would pay more attention to the little things. I would begin to appreciate the touch of love and the word of encouragement. So many times we fathers are quick to criticize their failures, and so slow to praise and encourage them when they do something right.”
7. “Seventh, I would create an environment of belonging. I would want my children to know that they belong, and that they are important family members, because I realize that there are going to be people saying to them, ‘come do this, or try that.’ If they have a solid identity in the home and in the family they will not easily be led astray.”

8. “Last, but certainly not least, I would make God an intimate friend of my family. I would speak of God freely. I would communicate to them that God is involved in our family decisions. I would want them to see me pray and read the Bible and seek direction and leadership from Jesus Christ.”

I think that is a good list from Rev. Drescher, but there is more. The Bible has quite a bit to say about fatherhood, not the least of which is the parable of The Prodigal Son in the Gospel of Luke. That deserves it’s own sermon; so we’ll save that for another day. We heard in 1 Timothy 5: 8, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than a non-believer.” And in Ephesians 6:4, “Father’s do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Provide, discipline, and instruction- some of the traditional fatherly roles, are still important roles you can play in your children’s lives. They need all three from you.

Do the best you can with your children. Good parenting has less to do with how much money you make or even what you say; but much more to do with who you are. If you are a person of character, of strength, of integrity, of

honesty, of kindness, of gentleness, of humor, of loyalty, of helpfulness, and of faith; that will imprint on your children more than anything. Try to be the kind of person you'd like your child to become. Know that you will mess up. You know better than anyone your flaws, your shortcomings. But remember this, you could still do all things perfectly and have it not work out for your children. If you do your best and your child ends up troubled or in trouble in some way, do not consider yourself a failure. Not only don't kids come with instruction manuals they don't come with warranties, either.

Finally fathers, you are to pray. You pray because you're not sure how to answer all of their questions, or solve all of their problems, or even how to be a good father, so you pray. You pray that God will help you, and give you strength, wisdom, and guidance. Pray that you'll be sensitive to what is going on in their lives. Pray that you will be loving and understanding and authoritative and all the things that fathers are called to be. Because, without God's help, you just cannot be the father your children need you to be.

AMEN