

## “Thank God for Dads”

Date: June 16, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Father’s Day

Theme: Fathers

Texts: Ephesians 6:1-4; Galatians 2:15-21

Welcome to Father’s Day 2019. It’s not easy being a father; it has many challenges, including raising daughters. I feel very fortunate; it has been pretty easy being Dad to our daughter Katrina.

I heard about a man who had been warned that as his three daughters became old enough to date, he would disapprove of every young man who took them out. When the time came though, he was pleased that this prediction was wrong. Each boy was pleasant and well-mannered.

Talking to one of his daughters one day, he said to her that he liked all of the young men she and her sisters brought home; that they were all very nice boys. “You know, Dad,” she replied, “we don’t show you everybody.” I imagine not.

Today is a special day set aside to honor and to pay tribute to our fathers. I’d like to share this tribute written by Mary Dawson Hughes. It is entitled “A Father Is.”

“A father is someone who explains how things work  
and makes you want to be as smart as he is.

A father is someone with extra pennies in his pocket,  
and extra warmth in his smile.

A father is someone who takes you places –  
and makes those places special, just because you’re together.

A father is someone who expects an awful lot of you,  
and thinks that trying hard is the most important thing.

A father is someone you share a special love with forever and ever.”

A special “thank you” to all of our Dads. I want to focus our attention on the 20<sup>th</sup> verse of the second chapter of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Here is the ultimate secret of being a good Dad, or Mom, or grandparent, son or daughter. Ultimately it is the secret of being a good follower of Jesus. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me....”

What does Paul mean when he says that he has been crucified with Christ? Certainly it does not mean that he has been crucified literally – with nails in his hands and feet. No, what is crucified is Paul’s old way of living. His pride and his self-righteousness. His sense of moral superiority. His disdain for people who did not think or worship as he did.

It is amazing that the Paul who persecuted people because of their religious beliefs could be same Paul who wrote 1 Corinthians 13 – that beautiful passage on love. “Love is patient, love is kind; it does not envy, does not boast; it is not proud or rude or self-seeking.”

It’s hard to believe that Saul the persecutor wrote these words. Remember that when Saul (as he was known then) first came to Jerusalem to join the disciples, they were all afraid of him. They knew his reputation. There was nothing *loving* about this man they had heard about.

And that is just the point. The old Saul was dead. Now there was a new man – renamed Paul – who had been fashioned after the character of Christ. Now loving, forgiving, accepting, caring. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” That was the testimony of the *new* Paul.

That's what we all need, is it not? To be crucified with Christ and to become new persons in him. Particularly it's true of Dads. Have you ever heard of a thing called "the male ego?" Of course you have; it is part of the male character causing many men to think the world revolves around them.

I'm stereotyping here, of course. Women also have egos. But part of the socialization of most women includes learning to think of "we" and not just "me." Not so with many men. It is often all about them – what they want. Let me tell you about one man who defied the stereotype.

Harmon Killebrew, the great baseball player of yesteryear, tells in his autobiography about growing up in a home with four boys. He says that on one occasion his father was out in the front yard playing baseball with the boys. A neighbor walked by and said, "Mr. Killebrew, if you keep playing baseball on your front lawn, you won't have any grass left in your yard."

Mr. Killebrew said, "Sir, I'm not raising grass, I'm raising kids." I love that answer. For some men having a beautiful lawn is extremely important and they wouldn't want their kids playing ball on the grass. But this Dad put aside any thoughts he might have about having a prize lawn, and focused his attention instead on children boys. I love that.

When I talk about the male ego and how selfish some men can be, of course I'm stereotyping; there are many, caring men in the world. But it is also true that many men grow up fighting for a place in the sun. They're competitive, always looking out for number one, seldom thinking of the needs of others.

Many men need to die to their old selves and to be reborn with a new orientation. In Paul's words, to be crucified with Christ and to find a new life in him. Of course this is true of all of us, men and women, married and single, parents, grandparents and those living alone.

But for those who are in a situation where they are responsible for not only another person's physical needs, but also their emotional needs, there is a special necessity for a Christ-like love, a love more giving than the love we were born with.

Being a loving father does not always come naturally. It can be hard work. It means ignoring your own needs at times so that you can focus your attention on the needs of others. Some of us had fathers who were able to do that. Others of us had fathers who could not.

If somehow you never received that kind of unconditional love from your parents, I hope you will receive it today from Christ. You don't have to earn His love. You don't have to be a super achiever. You don't even have to be a super Christian. God loves you just because you're you.

A number of years ago there was a story in a small publication entitled *The Christian Reader*. It concerns a father who touched his child's life in an unexpected way. The story was titled "Priceless Scribbles." Let me share it with you this morning.

A young boy watched as his father, a minister, walked into the living room. The boy noticed that his younger brother, John, began to cower slightly as his father entered. The older boy sensed that John had done something wrong. Then he saw from a distance what his brother had done. The younger boy had opened his father's brand new hymnal and scribbled all over the first page with a pen.

Staring at their father fearfully, both brothers waited for John's punishment. Their father picked up his prized hymnal, looked at it carefully and then sat down, without saying a word. Books were precious to him, as all clergy can attest. For him, books were knowledge. What he did next was remarkable, says the author of this story.

Instead of punishing his brother, instead of scolding or yelling, his father took the pen from the little boy's hand, and then wrote in the book himself, alongside the scribbles John had made. Here is what the father wrote: "John's work, 1959, age 2. How many times have I looked into your beautiful face and into your warm, alert eyes looking up at me, and thanked God for the one who has now scribbled in my new hymnal. You have made the book sacred, as have your brother and sister, to so much of my life."

"Wow," thought the older brother, "This is punishment?" The author of the story, now an adult, goes on to say how that hymnal became a treasured family possession. It was tangible proof that their parents loved them, how it taught the lesson that what really matters is people, not objects. It also taught them patience, not judgment; love, not anger."

Friends, that kind of love doesn't come naturally to many of us. What many of us need is to be reborn. Not in a doctrinal sense, but in a practical one. We need a new heart. We need new emotions. We need to be made new to the love of Jesus Christ, and to die – or let go of – our old selves.

That's true of Dads; that's true of Moms; that's true of single women and men. St. Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

May it be so with you and me. Amen.