



Fatherhood of God

A teacher in New York decided to honour each of her Seniors in high school by telling them the difference they each made. She called each student to the front of the class, one at a time. First she told each of them how they had made a difference to her and the class. Then she presented each of them with a blue ribbon imprinted with gold letters, which read, "**Who I Am Makes a Difference**". Afterwards the teacher decided to do a class project to see what kind of impact recognition would have on a community. She gave each of the students three more ribbons and instructed them to go out and spread this acknowledgement ceremony. Then they were to follow up on the results, see who honoured whom and report back to the class in about a week.

One of the boys in the class went to a junior executive in a nearby company and honoured him for helping him with his career planning. He gave him a blue ribbon and put it on his shirt. Then he gave him two extra ribbons and said, "We're doing a class project on recognition, and we'd like you to go out, find somebody to honour, give them a blue ribbon, then give them the extra blue ribbon so they can acknowledge a third person to keep this acknowledgement ceremony going. Then please report back to me and tell me what happened."

Later that day the junior executive went in to see his boss, who had been noted, by the way, as being kind of a grouchy fellow. He sat his boss down and he told him that he deeply admired him for being a creative genius. The boss seemed very surprised. The junior executive asked him if he would accept the gift of the blue ribbon and would he give him permission to put it on him. His surprised boss said, "Well, sure." The junior executive took the blue ribbon and placed it right on his boss's jacket above his heart. As he gave him the last extra ribbon, he said, "Would you do me a favour? Would you take this extra one and pass it on by honouring somebody else. The young boy who first gave me the ribbons is doing a project in school and we want to keep this recognition ceremony going and find out how it affects people."

That night the boss came home to his fourteen-year-old son and sat him down. He said, "The most incredible thing happened to me today. I was in my office and one of the junior executives came in and told me he admired me and gave me a blue ribbon for being a creative genius, Imagine. He thinks I'm a creative genius. Then he put this blue ribbon that says 'Who I Am Makes a Difference' on my jacket above my heart. He gave me an extra ribbon and asked me to find somebody else to honour. As I was driving home tonight, I started thinking about whom I would honour with this ribbon and I thought about you. I want to honour you. My days are really hectic and when I come home I don't pay a lot of attention to you. Sometimes I scream at you for not getting good enough grades in school and for your bedroom being a mess, but somehow tonight, I just wanted to sit here and, well, just let you know that you do make a difference to me. Besides your mother, you are the most important person in my life. You're a great kid and I love you!"



The startled boy started to sob and sob, and he wouldn't stop crying. His whole body shook. He looked up at his father and said through his tears, "Dad, earlier tonight I sat in my room and wrote a letter to you and Mom explaining why I had killed myself and asking you to forgive me. I was going to commit suicide tonight after you were asleep. I just didn't think that you cared at all. The letter is upstairs. I don't think I need it after all".¹

As Christians we say the word Father in relation to God so easily and almost without thinking of all that it means. So this morning I want to look at the Fatherhood of God and it's rich and lovely meaning to us, his children who follow Jesus.

We always need to remember that Jesus was a Jew and our Christian faith emerged from this Jewish background. The name of God was so awesome to the Jews that they wouldn't speak it out loud. This is what the commentator on the Lord's or family prayer says in his book:

The name for God is represented in English by the letters YHWH and is referred to by the technical description as the 'tetragrammation'. This name was so holy that the Jews would not pronounce it in case they committed blasphemy against God. We now would represent this by the word Yahweh. (Though sometimes we get the word Jehovah But this word is so sacred to the Jews that in their word 'donay' My Lord was substituted. And the vowels for this word and 4 letters give us the word Yahweh.²

Yet when the followers of Jesus asked him to teach them to pray, he starts this model prayer by the words:

*Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be your name.*³

So he is saying to Jewish people, you can call Yahweh, this awesome creator God, Father. It's ok he is saying that is how God himself would like you to approach him, as your Father. The NT Greek word for Father is 'pateer' and in it's most basic it means ancestor. So our Father is our ancestor, the one from whom we come. But Jesus is saying to these Jewish people who heard him, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who are the patriarchal father's of Israel, this God you too can call Father as well as them. God is not some distant, uncaring deity, but the one that you personally can call Father. You are his child, just as much as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In a perfect and ideal world we all would have had perfect parents. This would include a father who along with our mothers had showed us perfect parenting. We would therefore know what a precious and intimate thing it is to call God, Father. But in many people's lives this is not the case. What may happen is that we project on to God as our Father the poor fatherhood we learnt from our own parents, particularly our own dad.

¹ 'A Barrel of Fun' - J. John & Mark Stibbe

² 'The Lord's Prayer for Today' - William J Carl III

³ Matthew 6:9 KJV



Never the less Jesus says we can all call God our Father. In the book of Chronicles in the Old Testament we hear these words:

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. 1 Chronicles 16:34 (NIV)

So God is good and he loves us deeply so even if we have had poor parenting, particularly from our Father we should still be able to call God our Father.

But how do we know what the Father is like, how do we know that he is good and is a loving God. Remember when Philip asked Jesus:

"Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

And remember Jesus reply where he said:

"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves'. John 14:8-11 (NIV)

So in looking at the life of Jesus in the Gospels we see what God is like. Jesus was kind to ordinary people, he healed the sick and set people free. Hence God the Father is the same, he has perfect, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.⁴

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus to us, and through this revelation of Jesus we are lead to God as our perfect loving Father. Just as Jesus was loving and kind, so too is God loving and kind towards us as a Father.

Some people may question whether God is Father to all of us, or just to those who are Christians. Yet Paul writes:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family[a] in heaven and on earth derives its name. Ephesians 3:14-15

Towards the end of the sermon on the mount in Matthew chapter 5 when Jesus is talking to whole multitude of people he talks about their Father who is in heaven and their heavenly Father. So God is the Father of all people.

⁴ Galatians 5:22&23



In Ephesians Paul writes:

He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. Ephesians 1:5 (NIV)

What Paul is referring in this passage about adoption was the practice in that culture, both Hebrew and Roman, that a father would make a public announcement when a son of his reached a certain level of maturity, that henceforth, that son could speak for His father and conduct business with the authority of the father in matters relating to the administration of the family household, estate, business, etc. with his son standing there with him. This is pretty much the custom that continues today among Jews at a bar mitzvah.⁵

So all are sons and daughters of God whether they know Jesus or not. But when we come into a knowledge of Jesus by grace through faith, we receive all the benefits of the fatherhood of God. We truly recognise our position within the family of God. Peace and joy start to flow in our lives by virtue of our recognised position with God as our Father, through Jesus the son.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, just before his death, he was in a place called Gethsemane praying. Mark writing his gospel says he began to be deeply distressed and troubled⁶. Jesus says to his disciples:

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."

Mark 14:34 (NIV)

The Jesus prays to God as his Father and he says:

"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Mark 14:36 (NIV)

Jesus uses this word Abba when he addresses God as his Father. This is an Aramaic word and it literally means dada. It is the sort of word a very small child would use to their parents when they first start speaking. It is a very intimate word. This shows the very close relationship that Jesus had with God as his father. Remember he said that he and the Father were one. There was an intimate close relationship between a son and his loving and totally supportive Father.

It is interesting that I never called my Father daddy as far as I can remember in the whole of my life. This just indicates that I never did have that close a relationship with my father. Certainly not a very intimate, warm and close relationship. And yet there are many children even when they are grown up who still call their Father 'daddy' when they talk to them.

⁵ From email from John Gavazzoni.

⁶ Mark 14:33



When Paul writes his magnificent letter to the Christians in Rome he writes:

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship And by him we cry, "Abba Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Romans 8:15-16 (NIV)

Paul says that we as God's children can use the same intimate word towards God as our Father. We can cry out 'daddy' when we talk to God. This indicates that God desires this intimacy with us.

The last time I came to this church I preached from the letter to the Hebrew Christians and the theme was all about Intimacy with God. You probably don't remember it all, as it was on the 2nd April last year. But the writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus has made a way through for us right into the presence of God. God really does desire this close intimacy with us as his children. The place where we can cry 'Abba' Father.

I always remember that God is the creator of the whole universe. He is awesome in power and knowledge. Yet I also rejoice that through Jesus I can draw near to him and call him 'daddy' or 'abba' and he really doesn't mind. In fact I believe he is overjoyed and becomes excited when we as his children, enjoy this close intimacy with him as our Father.

It would be very easy as Christians to have just an understanding of God as our Father in our minds, but not know the reality of this in our lives. But God wants each one of us here today to know him in a close personal way as our 'abba', daddy sort of person. He wants our emotions and feelings to be involved as well as our mind and thinking. All this is part of his unconditional, unlimited and unconstrained love for us.

In James it says:

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. James 4:8 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

We don't have to make any big effort. If we just turn towards God like the prodigal son he will come running to meet us and through his arms around us. It helps when we realise just how much he cares for us. Do we realise how much he thinks about us all the time.

I want to finish by playing a song called Father's Obsession⁷. This says how much we are on his mind and how much he thinks about us all the time.⁸

⁷ CD - 'You will always be Father to me' - Robert Critchley

⁸ Words 2403 - 12 to 15 minutes