

SERMON 942

Father's Day

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday, June 21, 2015

1,003rd Week as Priest

830th Week at St Dunstan's

95th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

LOVING KINDNESS

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Today is the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, but it is also Father's Day. Perhaps it is a holy coincidence that the lessons for today make a strong connection with the celebration of today and of fathers.

This connection, this inter-relatedness of fathers and lessons begins with our collect of the day. "You never fail to help and govern those whom you have set upon the foundation of your loving-kindness." That combination of two separate ways of being, loving and kindness, is known as "steadfast love" in other translations, but loving-kindness is the older of the two terms, for it appears in the King James or Authorized Version of the Bible from 1611. Loving-kindness and

steadfast love are translations of the Hebrew word, *chesed*, which refers to a love which is both promised and owed. The prophet Hosea wrote, “When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son.”

The English translator Miles Coverdale first used the phrase “loving-kindness,” and he in fact created the hyphenated word phrase to speak of God’s devotion to God’s people. Loving-kindness means more than simple kindness shown by one person for another. It is beyond mercy, devotion, or dedication. It is steadfast, meaning that it believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Steadfast love never ends. It is the love that God shows for us, and it is the love that conquers all opposition and all evil and all hatred. If you understand the meaning of *chesed*, then you understand the love that God has for us. *Chesed* is proof that your life is of infinite importance to God. *Chesed* demonstrates that God takes your life, and what you choose to do with it, seriously.

This steadfast love, this loving-kindness of God, is also the love that a good and holy father seeks to have for his child. It is the love that God the Father has for the Son. But it is also the love that your father should have had for you.

This love is boundless, unqualified, and complete. This steadfast love is fully willing to suffer and sacrifice for you. This loving-kindness is unconditional and full to overflowing. It does not demand love in return. It yearns for such love, but that love given in return must be given freely, wholly, and with no strings attached.

We cannot earn such a father's love. But neither can we destroy it. Such a love is eternal and everlasting. It defies death, and it brings new life.

The loving-kindness of the Father is beyond all expectations, hopes and dreams. Such love is strong and certain and can never be exhausted or used up.

Perhaps as you think of your own father, you remember him as an imperfect and sinful man. Maybe he wanted to be a good man, a good husband, a good father. But if he was weak, or lacking in confidence and faith, then you were most likely hurt by his decisions and indecisions. And for that I am very sorry. You should have had it better; nobody deserves a bad father. And it makes so much difference when you have a good father.

If we could go back in time, and do it over again, I would want to make sure that you have a father who is loving and caring, good and holy, encouraging and

generous.

My own father never shared with me the secrets of his own heart. I never felt that I truly knew him, because he was a very proud and private man. But he loved me and my brothers with a fierce affection and he was committed to our present well-being and our good future. He was taught never to show his feelings, and he never, ever, apologized for anything he had done or left undone. Part of that was the age in which he grew up. More of it was the hardship and the suffering he experienced as a child and as a young adult. His mother died when my father was a child. He was raised by a demanding father, my grandfather. And he lived through hell in the South Pacific in the Second World War—and carried with him remnants of those ar experiences for the rest of his life. But he loved his sons, and he would do anything for us. Anything.

My father insisted that we be young men of character, integrity, and total commitment to every task. He despised half-hearted attempts, and he encouraged us to give more than 100% to each effort.

Bill Warren would have been proud of a boy like David, felling the giant Goliath with a sling-shot and cutting off his head. My father couldn't tolerate bullies,

and he instilled that same attitude in us. Like Paul, he could endure hardships, afflictions, and calamities. He never cared what others thought of him, and he cared deeply about his own self-evaluation. He did not regard wealthy or powerful people with deference, but he held education and ability in high esteem. Trying your best was what life was about for Bill Warren. Failing was a natural consequence from time to time, but it was an opportunity for developing greater skill and more determination—and for eventual success. Unlike the disciples in the boat with Jesus, my father was not afraid of what the world or other people could dish out. But he would do battle with a bully any day of the week.

I now see that much of Bill Warren's character and convictions came from his father, Perrin Warren. My grandfather once chased a man down the Hiawassee River Road, jumped on the gas truck, pulled the man from the cab, and beat him senseless—all for shortchanging him on a tank of gasoline. But my father and grandfather were also men of high principles and stern judgment. They refused to tolerate discrimination or unfairness of any kind, and had a Ku Klux Klan cross burned in their farmyard one night because of it.

So you see that my opinion about fathers is not entirely consistent. I love the Father's steadfast love, his

loving-kindness, and I need it. But I also admire my father and grandfather's toughness and resolve to overcome deceit and cowardice and depraved impulses in all their manifestations and faces.

I suppose I would say that a father should be calm and strong and gentle—just like a priest. A father should be a good listener, an encourager, and a mentor. A good father must be willing to suffer and sacrifice for others-- his family, his children, his wife. And a good father should be an example, a man of conviction and purpose. These characteristics, I now realize, are the qualities I admire in Jesus of Nazareth. AMEN.

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