

Sunday June 18th, 2017
Father's Day

PRAYER: O God, we were far away from home. We had squandered our inheritance; we had sinned against you; we were not worthy to be called your children. But now, O God, we have come home. Where would we be but in our Father's house? Let your Spirit dwell within us, Lord, so that when you seek us, you shall find us where you would have us be.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION: O God, you so freely pardon all who repent and turn unto you, now fulfill in every sincere heart your promise of redeeming grace. Forgive all our sins and those things we have failed to do, cleanse us from guilt and keep us walking in the ways of holiness and fruitfulness, that we may serve you all the days of our lives. This we pray through Jesus Christ our Saviour, Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE: To the children of faith, God has said in Isaiah 44:22, "I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like a mist: return to me, for I have redeemed you." Let us accept the acts of God on our behalf and return unto fullness of fellowship with him.

OFFERTORY SENTENCE: "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation of shadow due to change." (James 1:17)

PASTORAL PRAYER: At a time when we were orphaned, when we had no home, when we wandered aimlessly through life, you came to us Dear God and offered us your self. You claimed us as your own children. You challenged us to call you Father and in fact asked us to be more intimate than that and call you "Abba" or Daddy. We hear you offer Father, but we are hesitant. Our own earthly relationship with families has not been what it should be so we wonder what your family will be like. We have known strife, anger and even neglect, at the hands of those who claim they love us, so what shall you offer us. It is no mystery why when we need your presence in our lives we would rather choose isolation. We fear the unknown, and we fear being hurt once again. But then we see Jesus, your only begotten Son, and Jesus seems so at peace when he talks with you. He seems so connected to you that the boundaries between the two of you blur and become indiscernible. We long for that same relationship. A relationship that transcends anything we have experienced on earth. We long for family, for your family.

Thank you for welcoming us and calling us sons and daughters. And we know, O God, that our relationship with you can transform all our relationships. We pray often for "your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven". Well we know that in heaven you are close and intimate with your son. Love flows openly and freely between you. That is your will, that love should define your relationship. How we long for such a relationship with our spouses, our children, our parents and our friends. How we long for honesty, mutual sharing and mutual support. We plead today, our Father, that our families and our relationships might reflect your relationship with Jesus. We pray that parents and children will experience love and affection. We pray that our homes will be protected from those things that seek to destroy the harmony and bonds that keep us together.

Heal, we pray, the disease of selfishness that eats away at our relationships. Inspire us to seek better marriages, better friendships so that people will be drawn to our source of hope which is you.

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Today being Father's Day, we celebrate first of all, that you are our Father and that you love each one of us as unique and special individuals. We also celebrate those men who are our earthly father's, grandfathers, uncles and other special men who guided and nurtured us along life's journey. We thank you for their selfless acts; especially their willingness to work day in and day out to supply our needs. We thank you for the offer of their time to play and share of themselves. We thank you for the simple pleasures of love that turn out to be the precious of all memories. Those shared times of laughter, those projects completed together, those moments when we were cheered on as we tried our best in our sports endeavors, or our musical events, or the pride in our report cards and accomplishments. Thank you for fathers, or for those who became fathers for us. May you bless the memories of those who have gone on to be with you, and may you bless those fathers who are still amongst us.

Finally, Dear God, we lift up in prayer those children, and those adults for whom no earthly father is available or who are separated for some reason from their fathers. Grant unto them someone who can act as a special friend to fulfill some of the father's role. Grant them a sense of peace that comes from knowing you are with our fathers wherever they may be. Grant hope to those fathers who struggle with issues of poor health, financial insecurity or no saving knowledge of Christ. We pray you might do wondrous things for our fathers, not only for their benefit, but more importantly for your glory.

Call to us today God out of your word and through your Spirit, as we continue to worship. We pray together in Christ's name, Amen.

BENEDICTION: We sang your praises, Lord, and as our voices mingled, our elders became youth, and our youths became elders. You are the one who embraces all generations, who makes of us together more that we can make of ourselves alone. Every day, we will bless you for this, O God, that the world may witness the faithfulness of your word and the graciousness of your work.

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Mark 5:21-43

“A Father's Love”

The minister's little daughter was forced to go to bed early with a stomach ache, and this meant she missed her usual pre-bedtime play time with her father. After she had been in bed just a few minutes, she appeared at the top of the stairs and called to her mother, “Mommy, let me talk to Daddy.” Mom replied, “No my dear, not tonight. You need to rest, so get back into bed.” “Please Mommy?” she pleaded.

“I said, no and that's final. Now get back into bed.” Then with all the bluster a small child can muster the little girl shouted down the stairs. “Mother, I'm a very sick woman and I must see my pastor at once.” (I001 Humorous Illustrations, p. 251) What a delightful little story, and no I don't think Rachel ever tried that on Laura and I. I am, however, fully conscious of how nothing unnerves a parent more than when their child is sick.

One of the most frightening nights of my life happened several years ago, when Joshua contracted a very nasty throat and respiratory infection, including a high fever. Even though he was still a young boy, his body size made children's liquid medications inappropriate, but he could not bring himself to swallow a pill, including an antibiotic which made medicating him tricky. I will never forget how anxious both Laura and I were, and how at one point I took to sitting outside his room, just listening to his raspy breathing, to make sure he was okay.

As a pastor, I have sat in many a waiting room, which is always an anxious place to be, but a waiting room at Sick Kids is a whole new level of anxiety. That got me to wondering why it is that we become unglued whenever our child is ill, especially seriously ill. I think at least one factor, has to do with the fact that when one of our parents is ill, we feel that our past is somehow threatened, but when our child is ill, we feel our future is threatened.

Among many things, we have invested our hopes and dreams in our children. We want them to be successful, to do great things, and ultimately represent us well in the future. It is also true that in many cultures, and even our own to certain extent, we depend on our children for support, in our declining years. We place trust in them that as we age, and become infirmed in some manner, they can manage our affairs, deciding on our care and financial matters.

But most of all, we just simply love our kids. We just can't help ourselves. We would do just about anything for them, no matter their age. So, I think we can appreciate fully the story in our Gospel lesson today about a man named Jairus. Jairus was a leader or elder of the local synagogue. He was a man who was well known in the village, and surrounding territory, and would have carried some influence in the affairs of the synagogue and likely the town itself.

However, despite his influence, and religious devotion, something happened in his household that was beyond his control. His little girl, who was twelve years old, had become ill. I should point out that one commentator pointed out that the phrase “little girl” is a term of endearment rather than an indication of age. In other words, Jairus loved his girl deeply. We would say, she was the apple of his eye. The illness is not specified, but it was likely some type of bacterial or viral infection.

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Whatever it was, it made her very ill, to the point that Jairus feared it would claim his little girl's life. I am sure that Jairus tried everything he could to help his little girl. Like the woman in this passage who hemorrhaged for twelve years, doctors would have been consulted. Herbs and salves would have been applied. Teas administered. When you are desperate you will try anything.

Nothing seemed to help his little girl, and time was running out; they were losing her. That's when he gets word that Jesus has come to town. By this point in time, Jesus is well known in the area of Galilee. He has gained the reputation as a miracle worker; healing sick people, exorcising demons etc. However, there was some controversy about him. Jairus knows that many religious leaders think poorly of Jesus, yet people are healed by him.

Jairus doesn't think about it very long. His little girl has more value than his standing in the community. He'd give up everything he has to save his precious little girl. Then in his heart he comes to acknowledge that he knows Jesus can heal her. He has done it for others, why not his beloved girl. So, Jairus rushes out, pushing through the throngs of people (not an easy task) and when he finally comes upon Jesus, in desperation and likely tears, he falls down in front of Jesus begging him to come and heal his daughter.

No hesitation from Jesus. Jesus doesn't debate theology with Jairus, or ask for anything from him. The bible simply states, that Jesus went with him. The pace to his daughter though, was frustratingly slow. The crowds, many with their own needs, were pressing in on Jesus, calling out to him, touching him. Jairus' anxiety would have been climbing exponentially with each moment of delay. Then, in the midst of the crowd there is a woman, who had suffered for twelve years from hemorrhaging. A condition that made her ritually unclean in Jewish law.

She too was anxious, exhausted, and frustrated. She too had also consulted doctors, spending large amounts of money to end her agony but nothing worked. The doctors actually made her condition worse. She too had heard of Jesus, and she had faith enough to reason that if she just touched his robe that would be enough to be healed. Jairus and this woman, both desperate, as were plenty of others in the crowd that day.

Please note the little girl was twelve, and the woman suffered for twelve years. The number is significant as it represents the twelve tribes of Israel in need of healing. So, the woman sneaks through the crowd, and slips out her hand and touches the fringe of Jesus' robe, and immediately she can feel her body being healed. Wonderful! But Jesus has felt the power of the Holy Spirit leave him, and he knows someone has been healed by touching him.

"Who touched my clothes?" Jesus asked. Hold on a minute! What a ridiculous question the disciples thought, look at this crowd; everyone is touching you. But Jesus was determined to find out who touched him and was healed, and eventually the woman in fear and trembling, comes forward. She is frightened, and ashamed at being so bold. But also, she is concerned because she is ritually unclean and has touched the teacher, the rabbi.

Jesus however, commends her for her faith and dismisses her in peace. All the while, poor Jairus, standing alongside Jesus is frantic with worry.

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“Jolly good for this woman, but can we pick up the pace Jesus.” Then the worst news any parent can receive. A messenger comes from Jairus’ home and drops the bomb. “Your daughter is dead.” I picture Jairus’ legs giving out, and him dropping in crushing despair. I know I would if I ever received such news. Then the obvious is stated, “There’s no use troubling the Teacher now.” It’s too late for Jesus. There is no hope left. Jesus may be able to heal, but dead is dead.

Such a conclusion is logical and no one disputed it, except Jesus himself. Maybe, as I picture it, Jesus placed a hand on Jairus, or helped him up, but I am sure Jesus’ heart was broken. To see a parent in such heart ache, well it’s almost too much to bear. I know I have seen it. “Don’t be afraid! Just trust me.” Then Jesus does what Jairus probably thought he should have done long before.

He stops the crowd from following, and they head off to Jairus’ home. The home was now filled and surrounded by people wailing and mourning. I should let you in on something cultural here. It was a common practice for wealthier families, like Jairus’, to hire professional mourners. This explains how they could switch from wailing to laughter in a heartbeat. Jesus sees the commotion and says, “Why all this weeping and commotion?”

The child isn’t dead; she is only asleep.” As I already mentioned, at this the people who were mourning, laughed at Jesus. He’s off his rocker they thought. Jairus and his wife aren’t laughing. There is nothing funny going on here. But Jesus kicks them all out of the house, save the girl’s parents, and three disciples. (Peter, James and John) Note that Jesus takes the little girl’s hand, again a breach of ritual purity, as the girl was dead.

Then Jesus, of course, heals the little girl, and the bible says her parents were overwhelmed. I mean who wouldn’t be. There are a lot of lessons in this passage. Lessons about faith, and trust, but I wonder what the story of Jairus can say to us, being that today is, after all, Father’s Day. When I think about Jairus, I recognize that he can represent anyone of us, and more specifically the fathers and mothers among us.

The majority of parents spend a great deal of themselves, and their resources to do what is best for their children. The word sacrifice is often associated with parenting. And so, parents drag themselves off to work every morning, to among many things, earn some money to house, clothe and feed their children. Then parents, rush around in their minivans driving children to piano lesson, sports games, and practices, and even church events.

I always felt bad, when I was kid, that my dad had to drag himself out of bed early on a Saturday morning, the only day he had every week to sleep a bit later, to take me to a hockey game or practice at 7am, especially, when yours truly was not much of a hockey player. But he did it, because he wanted what was best for me, and he loved me. Think about it. How many piano recitals, T-ball games, or school plays have you sat through because your child is involved.

There is, however, the strong possibility that at some point, when you least expect it, something can happen to your child, and you feel like you are out of options. Perhaps they become seriously ill, or get hurt, or are discovered to have a learning disability. Maybe, as some parents experience, your child simply seems to get into trouble at every turn.

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Times when you feel like you are at your wits end. "What am I going to do with him or her?" Times when you wonder if a bit of tough love is in order. It's like the old joke about two cannibal ladies sitting at the village well. One of the women is talking about her teenage son who is ruining his life. In exasperation she says, "I just don't know what to make of him." To which the other woman says, "Let me give you a good recipe."

As followers of Christ, there is one phrase that should never be in our vocabulary, and this goes especially, for when we are talking about our children. As a parent, and a follower of Jesus, we should never, ever say, he or she is "hopeless". No matter how bad the situation gets for our children or ourselves, there is always hope. When we believe we have exhausted all our resources to solve a problem, or meet a challenge, we can also undertake the one thing we should have done in the first place.

We do exactly what Jairus did, we go to Jesus and we lay our burden at his feet. Even when we think there are more critical matters for Jesus to be concerned about, or we erroneously think he has too much to deal with, as so many people are clamoring for his attention, we need to still go to him. If you ever hear yourself saying, "I just don't know what to do, or what to do with my son or daughter." Take it to Jesus.

And this approach to our relationships goes far beyond our children. As followers of Christ and people of hope, no one we encounter is beyond the love and grace of Christ. That is one of the reasons Jesus calls us to sow seed everywhere we go, and not worry about whether the seed takes hold or not. Rob Bell in his book, *Love Wins*, talks extensively about this, but his major point is a good one. None of us in this world is ever without hope.

The Apostle Paul says it so well, "*Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened by death. No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Rom. 8:35-39)

Jesus demonstrated to Jairus, and the woman healed of hemorrhaging, that in Jesus there is always hope. His love transcends the moments of terror and uncertainty. His love is greater than our anxiety in the hospital waiting room, or as we sit in our easy chair waiting for our kid to come home long after the curfew has expired. We may not know what to do with our kids, or our troublesome co-worker, or difficult neighbour, but Jesus sure does.

Perhaps, there is no greater gift a parent can give their children than a sincere, clearly demonstrated confidence in Christ. Can we commit ourselves to dismiss immediately the voices in this world, whether Christian or not that tell us to "not trouble the teacher"? Such thoughts are faithless, and devoid of hope. Jairus demonstrated that whenever we feel we need to trouble Jesus that is the time to trouble him.

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In 1927 an S-4 submarine the SS-109 was rammed by the Coast Guard destroyer Paulding off the coast of Massachusetts near Cape Cod. It sank immediately. The entire crew of forty men was trapped in a prison house of death. Every effort was made to rescue the crew, but all ultimately failed. Near the end of the ordeal, a deep-sea diver, who was doing everything in his power to find a way for the crew's release, though he heard a faint rapping on the subs steel hull.

He placed his helmet up against the side of the vessel and realized it was Morse code. He listened carefully and worked out the communication in his mind by translating the code. It was the same message repeating over and over again. It was a question, from within: "Is...there...any...hope?" (Ben Patterson, *The Grand Essentials*) Just so you know the entire crew was lost but the sub was raised in 1928 and salvaged.

We live in a world where the staccato of tapping can be heard all around us. "Is there any hope?" We, as followers of Christ are in a unique position to say with great confidence that yes, there is always hope. And I can think of no greater way to demonstrate a father's love, or a mother's love or any kind of love than to offer hope.