

Father's Day, 2008

June 15, 2008

No Text

“May the words on my lips, and the thoughts in our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O God. Amen.”

This is a little different sermon than usual.

Usually Linda and I preach from one of the scripture texts for the day.

We start with the text and listen to what the text has to say for our lives.

This morning I haven't started with a particular text, I've started with the subject of Father's Day.

I went through the 4 gospels this week thinking about what they have to say about fathers.

Fathers and families aren't that important a subject in the gospels.

The Christmas story identifies Jesus' parents as Mary and Joseph.

There is only one story of a family event in Jesus' growing up years – when Mary and Joseph and Jesus, as a preteen, are in Jerusalem with the extended family. They leave to return to Nazareth only to discover a day into the return trip that their son Jesus is not with them! Mary and Joseph retrace their steps and discover their son in the temple dialoguing with the rabbis. Jesus is chastised by his mother – we read in Luke 2:48 – “look your father and I have been searching for you and in great anxiety”. And Jesus responds – “Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?”

Jesus' relationship with his earthly father, Joseph, is much less important than his relationship with his heavenly father.

This story is about the last we hear of Joseph. It's not to say he wasn't a good father, it does tell us that for the writers of the 4 gospels, any stories about Jesus' relationship with his father, Joseph, were not seen as important to proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

What does Jesus have to say about fathers?

In his teachings he repeats and emphasizes one of the commandments from his Jewish roots – “honour your father and your mother.” ....

In the call stories, Jesus encounters persons who he calls to leave behind parts of their lives that have been important up to now – father, mother, family, occupation, hometown, to follow Jesus.

The cost of being a disciple of Jesus – all of a sudden your priorities are expected to change – family, occupation, hometown, are no longer at the top of your list – following Jesus and doing God’s work becomes what matters most.

Leaving behind things that had been important is part of the radical call to follow Jesus. In Matthew 4:21 we read: “Jesus saw 2 brothers, James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and Jesus called them. Immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.”

And in Matthew 8:21 we read – “Another of Jesus’ disciples said to him, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ But Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

Anything that Jesus has to say about fathers and family wouldn’t appear on Hallmark Father’s Day cards!

A lot of the Father’s Day cards I looked at seemed quite a bit over the top! If we were quoting Jesus on Father’s Day cards we would have to put things like –

Matthew 10:34 – “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother....and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

Our relationships in our nuclear family are not the most important thing. Our relationship with God is of ultimate importance.

Family is redefined by Jesus. It is not about blood lines and family of origin, it is about belonging to the family of God, the Kingdom of God. The most important family is not the family of our birth, it is the family of God that we become part of by choosing to follow Jesus Christ and be part of the body of Christ.

Jesus' relationship with his mother, father, brothers, extended family, does not play a significant role in the gospel accounts.

Jesus has a relationship with his heavenly Father, and he calls people into that relationship, into the family of God. His image of family is big – bigger than the families we are born into; an image of family that brings together all people who are seeking to follow Jesus. Our brothers and sisters, our fathers and mothers, are no longer just those who we are related to by birth; our brothers and sisters are those who are called by God into the Jesus community; and our brothers and sisters, our family, is anyone in need; anyone who enters our lives; people far and wide.

Here is my father and mother, here are my brothers and sisters, here and everywhere, all people.

I hope I haven't trivialized Father's Day or made it sound like our family of origin is unimportant. We are deeply connected to our family. Family plays a huge role in creating who we become. Within our families we learn values and ways of interacting that often stay with us for our whole lives.

We become the people we are through our families.

We know both strength and brokenness through our families; we know deep joys and also heart aches in our families; we experience love and we experience deep pain in our families. Our parents, our fathers and mothers, travel with us through all of our lives, even after they have died.

Today is a day to remember with gratitude the gifts we have received from our fathers – to give thanks for who they are – for the persons God has created them to be.

Fathers – perhaps in our prayer time we can remember with thanksgiving our fathers.

We heard this evening the wonderful story of “The Prodigal Son”.

The story is also called the Forgiving Father. On one level it is the moving story of a father who has two sons. And it is a story that shows us what God is like. God is like the forgiving father in our story, who loves us unconditionally, who grieves when we wander away from Him; who sees us returning from afar, and runs out to greet us and before we have a chance to ask for forgiveness he embraces us, and puts the best clothes on us and throws a party – “my son was dead and is now alive, was lost and is now found.” God's love for us is like the love of this father for his two sons.

Thanks be to God!