

“Children of God”

The Rev Drew Willard
UCC at The Villages, FL
June 17th, 2012 *Fathers' Day*

Romans 8:12-17

Mark 4:26-34

‘God’s Spirit makes us sure that we are his children.

His Spirit lets us know that together with Christ
we will be given what God has promised.’

Romans 8:16-17a

Let us pray... O God,

You are like both a Father and a Mother to us.

May we see you as the example of what human parents should be like, too.

Amen

Our current Christian education class is studying a book called,

Meeting Jesus Again For The First Time by Marcus Borg,

and in the first class we talked about how we first pictured Jesus.

Each person, in turn, spoke of when they had learned about Christ

whether it was in Sunday School or by seeing a picture of him

or through parents or teachers, reading the Bible or life experience.

And then, the class talked about how that first image changed over time.

It was a very good discussion as everyone shared

their impressions of Jesus Christ.

We didn’t talk about *God* specifically as to how we first imagined God

or how that picture of our Creator may have changed over time.

I remember realizing that my visualization of God as ‘Father’

was evolving for me by the time I was in 3rd or 4th Grade.

God as a white-haired, ancient man was too literal

and I wound up settling for a vague impression

of God existing as an underlying reality.

But what was important about this insight was that

as my ideas about God were changing for me –

I understood that it was not God who was changing.

When I started classes at Lancaster Theological Seminary in 1984,

it was at a time when inclusive language was being promoted.

And this was an effort to get away from the use of patriarchal or ‘fatherly’ imagery
particularly as it related to God.

Sometimes this meant saying ‘Father/Mother God’

as well as avoiding the masculine pronoun, ‘He’.

Though no one knew quite what to do about singing

‘hymns’... [sounds like ‘him’s – nevermind]

Willard, p.2

Unfortunately, a certain amount of antagonism towards 'men' in general came along with it.

Women seminarians were understandably zealous about this new feminist theology that was transforming social values to become more 'politically correct'.

But it seemed as if using the word 'Father' for the Divine was a dirty word.

Needless to say, we have all had our eyes opened to the realities of domestic abuse against women and children usually *perpetrated* by men and glass ceilings in the workplace that prevent women's promotions *perpetuated* by men.

So, there has been some constructive change in regard to inequities though this is an ongoing struggle in America and everywhere. And gay rights is another challenge to male entitlement – heterosexual males, that is.

The downside is there is a stigma about men in general being intrinsically aggressive, domineering, politically incorrect, and generally the bad guy which can be very confusing and disconcerting for men who are not way.

But as in everything in life, where there is a challenge, there is also a response – and one of the good things that has arisen in questioning the undisputed role of men in society is recognizing the important role of being a good 'father'.

I was very fortunate to have a father growing up and the first thing that comes to mind about my Dad is that he could fix anything –

Well, at least that is the myth about fathers, isn't it?

And that has been pretty much true about him.

I have always admired his confidence – or maybe stubbornness, with which he approached any kind of mechanical problem, believing he could repair it or know the reason why not.

One time after working on the car for hours

in the cold dark of a northern winter afternoon,

he came in for dinner saying,

"It's working again and I don't know why it went wrong in the first place!"

Willard, p.3

I have learned from him that God's world operates by "cause and effect" and where there's a will, there's a way – or a reason why not.

I believe that is one of the most important things a father can teach a child – like bread for the journey.

One of the things I feared most growing up was losing my father or mother. There are so many broken homes in the world due to death or divorce.

I am so grateful to have been spared such a loss.

I am glad I didn't have to know what that was like.

This is the role of a good parent at the very least:

to be a mature person who can teach by word and deed,

is an active presence in a person's life even when not physically there,

and to provide a safe place to eat, sleep, and be cared for.

And parents alone can't meet every child's need

as they seek their way in the world – so it is a role that must be shared

by teachers, pastors, co-workers, and relatives –

including grandparents.

But being a good father is gender-specific,

there is something that children get from being in the presence

of a man – gay as well as straight, in the role of being a father.

Robert Bly – the so-called 'father of the Men's Movement',

says that boys, especially need a man's presence in their lives

as a father.

His poetry and teachings speak to the crisis of the father's absence from home

since the advent of the industrial revolution as a particular cause for

depression, crime, and indecisive leadership in our society.

NBA player Etan Thomas has written and collected a series of essays

for his book, Fatherhood: Rising To The Ultimate Challenge.

A father's presence is emphasized throughout the book

and in the essay by Congressman Elijah Cummings of Maryland

this is very poignantly expressed.

Mr. Cummings said this about his father:

I always had a father in my life.

He only had a second-grade education,

but is one of the smartest men I have ever met...

I remember one Christmas,

it was the worst and the best Christmas I had ever had.

My father was laid off from [work], and I'll never forget it.

We came down Christmas morning and there was

nothing under the... tree.

My father reached behind his back and gave each of us a toothbrush.

Willard, p.4

He said,

*“I want you to keep this toothbrush,
and I know that you all were expecting presents,
and I wanted you to have presents,
but Daddy just couldn’t afford it.”*

And he had tears in his eyes... because Christmas meant a lot to him.

And he... said,

*“Let me tell you something, and... you’ll understand it by and by.
My presence in your life is present enough.”*

And what he said is true.

Without him I would not be the man I am today.

The presence he had in my life is what I owe everything to.

Our earthly fathers may not have been good fathers.

They may not have been around because of
work or estrangement, divorce or death.

Yet, to have a good father is important

and I hope for you that God as “Father” is an expression that has its place
and is significant as a good way –
while not being the only way, to think of God.

God is always present with us;

You can call on God anytime through prayer
just as you would call your Dad on Fathers’ Day.

And don’t wait for a holiday, but go ahead and call your children

and those who have been like children to you,
to remind them of your presence in their lives
just like God – whom we believe is still speaking.

Amen

Rom. 8:12-17

¹² My dear friends, we must not live to satisfy our desires.

¹³ If you do, you will die.

But you will live, if by the help of God's Spirit
you say "No" to your desires.

¹⁴ Only those people who are led by God's Spirit
are his children.

¹⁵ God's Spirit doesn't make us slaves who are afraid of him.
Instead, we become his children and call him our Father.

¹⁶ God's Spirit makes us sure that we are his children.

¹⁷ His Spirit lets us know that together with Christ
we will be given what God has promised.

We will also share in the glory of Christ, because we have suffered with him.

Mark 4:26-34

[26] And [Jesus] said,

"The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground,

[27] and should sleep and rise night and day,

and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how.

[28] The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear,
then the full grain in the ear.

[29] But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle,
because the harvest has come."

[30] And he said,

"With what can we compare the kingdom of God,
or what parable shall we use for it?

[31] It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground,
is the smallest of all the seeds on earth;

[32] yet when it is sown it grows up and
becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches,
so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

[33] With many such parables he spoke the word to them,
as they were able to hear it;

[34] he did not speak to them without a parable,
but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.