

"Seeds of Greatness"

Last month we celebrated Mother's Day and that is a good thing – let us never take for granted the vital role of mothers who nurture us and are examples of Christ's forgiveness and love for children, without which they can never fully develop into the persons God has intended them to be. I want to thank each every mother here, and especially the single mothers here – that's a tough job.

Equally **vital to each child's development is the father.** So today I'm going to reflect a bit on the importance of fathers – whose role I think, has been diminished in our culture. It is noteworthy, as we celebrate Father's Day, that Jesus called God "*Abba*" - Father - Papa. We can't escape that. He understood himself as "the Son" of his heavenly Father. This is no accident. Human fatherhood has an example, a mentor and model, to follow. God, our Father, is a sure and certain guide. That is why it so important to know God.

Guys, let me ask: What do we as fathers, as men, leave behind? There used to be a holly tree in back of the house we lived in up in Humboldt Co. You know how holly trees grow if they're not trimmed. . . I cut it down . . . spent the winter digging out roots . . . finally chopped out the main stump. Then spaded up all the ground, leveled some and scattered grass seed. For days nothing happened, but I was sure something would. Sure enough, green shoots of grass emerged and each day they grew longer and thicker, until there was a wonderful green lawn. I find a great satisfaction in seeing things grow. How about you? They say if you want to see results in one year grow wheat. If want results in ten years grow trees. But **if you are looking for eternal results grow people.** Jesus grew people and he often used stories about growing things to do it. We, as men and fathers, have a sure and certain mission on this earth.

Planting

Jesus told parables to illustrate God's truth. These stories are like windows and mirrors at the same time. Through them we get a glimpse of God, while they reflect our own image back to us, so we might see ourselves in a new light.

In one parable Jesus says the kingdom of God is like seed scattered on the ground, it grows day by day, we don't know how. But the seed inevitably does produce a harvest (Mark 4). So too the kingdom will surely come, because Jesus has begun it. **With confidence we can continue to plant seeds of the Kingdom,** walk by faith, **not discouraged if we don't see immediate results.**

In another parable Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, yet it produces a bush large enough for birds to nest in (Mark 4). Jesus' ministry seemed small, but his salvation has extended around the world. Consider this:

- a. a seed can germinate after being stored for centuries
- b. a seed of grain can yield 100 times its weight
- c. a spring harvest is planted in the fall
- d. crop yield cannot be determined as the seed is planted

The Father's Role

The Bible is filled with stories of God **growing greatness from small beginnings** (in fact that's what kids learned this past week at VBS). David, the youngest and smallest of Jesse's sons, became Israel's greatest king – a true hero. Paul, of humble origin, became the greatest of the Apostles. Jesus, though in the form of a slave, became Lord of the universe. From an insignificant land, at the edge of a great empire, his message spread throughout the earth and still brings salvation to people today. It is not the smallness we honor, but the power of God to bring greatness out of small beginnings. I'm convinced God intends us to live up to that image and expects each of us to grow to more than what we are today.

This holds true for each individual and for this church. What we have now is not the pinnacle of God's intention for this place. There's more growing ahead of us.

That's where I start my thoughts about fathers' day. Whether you are a biological father or not, you have a role as a father figure in this church. "Men need a sacred role, one only they can fulfill. Fortunately, God gave men such a role. **God calls every man to become a spiritual father**... [I'm thinking of a man of this congregation who has volunteered at the Good News Club we have over at Harris Elementary] It's a role that's not well understood because, like the Trinity, it's more implied than spelled out in Scripture. But the example of Jesus and the apostle Paul are clear; spiritual fathering is the only way to bring believers to maturity in Christ."¹ Part of Jesus' call was to be a spiritual father to the Twelve Disciples. Paul was called to do likewise with Timothy and Titus, whom he called his "*true child in the faith*." The spiritual father is a living example for others to emulate. Jesus imitated his Father, and provides us a model to imitate and men need other men to model themselves after. The spiritual father is one who is willing to walk alongside other men and help them grow to maturity in Christ; while also being courageous and bold where necessary. Men, we are to grow people to develop a heart after Jesus. (Jesus is the Lion of Judah – let's not de-claw him!)

Many churches suffer when men do not understand this or live by it. Men are absent in greater numbers from church, or a walk with God, than are women. Yet men, as well as women, have the responsibility to pass on to succeeding generations the truth about God our Creator, who revealed himself to us in Jesus. We are to help others build a firm foundation for life, not just so they can succeed in worldly terms, but so that they can also succeed on God's terms. In each encounter with our children we are planting seeds, and growing people. The results are eternal.

Living Examples

Men: we are influencers and role models. God is the ultimate model of fatherhood. Now some people didn't have good fathers as they were growing up. But the point is not to change our image of God, but to uphold the ideal of fatherhood and model our behavior after that. Ours is to plant the seed of good fatherhood, so that children will have the very best image of a father when they come to church, and hopefully when they return home.

There is no greater legacy for a father to pass onto his children than his faith in Christ. Christianity is a matter of infinite seriousness, far more serious than economics or politics. Christianity can give the true initiation into the mysteries of life and death, of heaven and hell, of spiritual warfare and the destiny of the human race. Men are easily tempted to ambition, with great designs for their careers and fortunes, that seem bigger than God's work. Yet our greatest work is how we help others grow in God's grace. Our hearts must be in this task if we are to grow hearts of faith and courage in others.

Recently I conducted a memorial service for a dear friend ... I shared that I once asked him what he thought was his greatest contribution to life – thinking he'd talk about the many surgeries he participated in that saved lives, or some award or recognition he'd received for his medical contributions to the community, his years providing health care to families, or some such thing. Nope. He just said, "I like to think that I raised children who are an asset to society." What he valued most was his role as father and dad. I picture in my mind a former member of this congregation who, at a time many begin to think about retirement, adopted two small children, redeeming them from a desperate situation. People who didn't know him thought he was their grandfather. Not long after he and his wife moved out of state. We've stayed in contact through Facebook and occasional visits. The little girl is now a college student, having won a scholarship for her softball pitching. The little boy – who had so many behavioral issues back then – is now entering his senior year of high school and playing in the marching band. Here's my point: our former church member, my friend, saved those kids' lives, through his example and by planting the seeds of the gospel in them.

¹David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2005), 215.

Psychological and sociological studies, statistics and surveys, all tell us what our traditions and Christian faith have been telling us for generations: fathers are essential to healthy growth of children and families and **an alternative to fatherhood is very difficult to find.** In a very real sense a father's guidance to his son is indispensable. Men can be taught to be men only by other men. Men must show boys that Christianity is not a threat to masculinity, but a fulfillment of manhood and responsible fatherhood. Christian fathers should instruct their sons, primarily by example. *So I am asking each one of you fathers and grandfathers to be regular in your church attendance and when you are here, participate, listen carefully, focus so that you can teach what is right to your children and grandchildren.* Surveys over the years have shown that fathers are the number one influence in the family in regard to church attendance and participation for both the boys and girls. Fathers should lead family prayers and read the Bible, and take the lead in getting the family to church. The second thing I ask of all the men and women here is this: help us build a church where men – especially the younger men – really feel at home.

The Father's Job

The purpose of the church is not to be a clinging mother, and the father's job is to separate his children from juvenile dependence and send them out prepared for the battle of life. The laity's role is out in the world, Christianizing our culture. Anyone who has tried to do this knows that it is a battle and that the Church needs more than just a few good men...² So men, here's some equipping:

1. Know who you are. Jesus said, *"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life"* (John 14:6); *"I am the good shepherd"* (John 10:11). Christ knew who he was! For you to help others find themselves, you must find yourself. You and I are sons of the Living God put on earth for a purpose, His purpose.

2. Know where you are going in this life. Jesus said, *"... for I know where I came from and where I am going"* (John 8:14). We must be *"... looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."* (Heb. 11:10). Our families, are counting on us to know the way.

3. Know what you are supposed to accomplish. Jesus prayed to His Father, *"I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do."* John 17:4. He knew his purpose and so must we.

Unless you plan your life and set priorities, you'll be pressured by what other people think is important. Every day you either live by priorities or by pressures; there is no other option. Our priority better be in God's plan – that is key to the future of our families and our communities and beyond. **What we sow in our lives and the lives of our children will have an eternal harvest.** We have all been called to plant the gospel and we'll be held accountable before the seat of Christ.

We cannot do what God does, but God will not do what we *can* do. God is reconciling the world to Himself, through us. Women have their essential part to play. Men, we have our essential part to play. Let's ask God to guide and strengthen us to do our part.

***"The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."* 1 Samuel 16:7.**

² John M. Haas "The Christian Heart of Fatherhood, The Place of Marriage, Authority & Service in the Recovery of Fatherhood" Touchstone January/February 2001, 49-51.