

**4 PENTECOST (LECTIONARY 12) FATHER'S DAY JUNE**  
**20,2010 CYCLE "C"**

**TITLE: YES, DAD, YOU'RE SPECIAL, YOU'RE VALUED,**  
**YOU'RE LOVED!**

**READINGS: Isa. 65:1-9, Ps.22:19-28, Gal. 3:23-29, Luke 8:26-39**

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY to all of us dads! It's not easy being a father. There was a cynic speaking from his own experience, who said children go through four fascinating stages. First they call you Dada. Then they call you Daddy. As they mature they call you Dad. Finally they call you collect. Maybe today we should say they just text a lot on your dime. A group of first graders was asked to draw a picture of God in their Sunday School class. Their finished products were interesting. One child pictured God in the form of a brightly colored rainbow. Another presented him as an old man coming out of the clouds. One little boy's picture looked like Superman. The best drawing, though, came from a little girl. She said, "I didn't know what God looked like, so I just drew a picture of my daddy."

We salute fathers this day, and being a good father isn't an easy job. Today's fathers need to be nurturing of their children, supportive of their wives, and yet at the same time providers of the spiritual leadership and direction of the Word of God. It is a rare man, a special man, who is able to combine all of these qualities. Families need good Christian fathers today even more than ever before.

When Jesus described God, the most common image he used was that of "Father." Jesus' own earthly father, Joseph, had to have possessed special qualities of strength and gentleness in order for Jesus to display such a deep love of the image of father. In the Jewish home it was the father who had the primary responsibility for a son's religious instruction. I have to believe that Joseph, though barely mentioned in the Gospels, was probably a very influential role model for Jesus.

In Matthew 10:29-31 we have one of the most important Scriptural reminders of the love of our Heavenly Father for his children. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground

without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." How beautifully Jesus describes the intimate love that the Father has for each one of us. Sometimes earthly fathers have difficulties with the fact that they are loved very dearly and intimately by God. Some say, Oh, I know God loves me, but he probably doesn't like me much. Of course, our image of God stems directly from the image we have of our own fathers and the self-image we have as well. If we have had a very stern, demanding and physically punishing father it is difficult for us to have a gentle, loving image of God. On top of that, if we have low self-esteem and look at ourselves as rather useless spiritually, it just complicates our image of a loving Father more than ever.

But this problem is not new. The Jews dealt with it many centuries ago. They believed that God would not tolerate sin. They believed that God was a punishing, revengeful God. So they developed a system where people were judged by the degree of their sin, the worse the sin the worse off you were with God. So this view left the sinner with the feeling that God totally despised them. By the time Jesus came to earth there had developed in Jewish society the spiritually haves and the spiritually have-nots. The haves believed they had God's love, and the have-nots believed they were pretty much lost. That is why the Pharisees had such a dilemma about Jesus. If he was a prophet, a holy man, one who was spiritually blessed so to speak, why then did he hang around with those have-nots. This man, they would say receives sinners and eats with them. Why would this prophet spend so much time with people who were clearly rejected by God? This condemning attitude, this emphasis on the wrath of God and God's punishment, the Old Testament notion of an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, continued even after Jesus' great commandment of love – even to our own day.

My own father had not grown too far beyond this condemning and damning attitude. He saw himself as one who needed the love and forgiveness of God, one who believed, but had little confidence in his own spiritual worth. He saw himself as a sinner in need of God's forgiveness, he would attend church, pray and try to be good, so to speak, but would slip and fall over and over again. I remember well the times he would say to

me, "Barney, I've got my ticket to hell." I would disagree and correct him, I thought, but he would just curse and say I was wrong. Despite his faults and his very rough, tough language and ways, I loved my father dearly and I assured him God loved him too. I know he knew that, but still his doubts remained. And I don't think it is too much different for a good deal of fathers today. But no matter how we see ourselves we must remind ourselves that we are forgiven, we are loved. We must remind ourselves no matter how many times we stumble and fall of what Paul heard his Lord say to him when he saw himself so weak in the face of adversity, "My Grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." 2Cor. 12:9-10.

We must remember that our God is a wonderfully loving Father who notices even a little sparrow fall from the sky. He is a loving and forgiving God who cares for us even though we might not think very highly of ourselves, even though we are sinners, he loves us still. And yes, dad, even though you fail, stand up, love and go on. Know dad, you're special, you're valued, you're loved! **Amen.**

**Pastor Barney**

In Marjorie Rawling's beautiful novel, *The Yearling*, set in rural Florida, there is a scene in which friends and family gather around the grave of a little handicapped boy named Fodderwing. There was no minister present so one of the men of the community (a father) offered up this simple but moving prayer: "Almighty God, it ain't right for us to say what is right. But if we had been making this boy we would never have made him with his back bent and his legs crooked. We would have made him straight and tall like his brothers. But somehow you made it up to him. You gave him a way with critters. It comforts us to know that he is in a place where his being bent doesn't matter no more. We would like to think that you have taken that bent back and those crooked legs and straightened them. And Almighty God, if it ain't asking too much, we pray that you will give him some critters to play with maybe a few redbirds and a squirrel or two. Thy will be done. Amen."