

God Made Fathers

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St. John's Presbyterian, Mt. Roskill

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Readings: Psalm 37:23-29, Deuteronomy 6:6-9, John 15:13-17, Ephesians 5:25-37

Today's sermon is deliberately entitled "God made Fathers". The American educationalist Kent Nerburn once made the observation that "[i]t is much easier to become a father than to be one.' He wasn't wrong. Men become fathers because God made humanity as man and woman as sent us out to populate the earth – and we've been doing a very good job of that every since. Well ... good at reproducing at least. But Nerburn's observation of the obvious is sadly all too accurate. It is one thing to have children, it is another to be a good mother or father. I watched with a degree of incredulousness the ridiculous ad that Spark is currently running with a young child giving a Father's Day card to his mother. The sentiment is understandable and heartfelt certainly but the reality is that only a Father can be a Father. Regardless of the politically correct liberals who are running society into the ground with their perverse gender social engineering God made humanity with two genders and each are intrinsically different. In the ideal situation children need men and women around them who will role model a Godly goodness and teach them to be loving, caring, responsible individuals. Any quick review of history will show you that the nuclear family as it existed in the period prior to the 1960's was pretty much an illusion of Western History. Rarely in world history has the nuclear family, that of mum, dad and kids in isolation, existed for any great length of time in a healthy manner. The extended family is by far the most common, and I suspect, the most healthy model. And note: this is not talking about accommodation arrangements so much as connectedness.

I need to take a brief side-track into some core theology. In the Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit, we have God as both one and three. God exists in relationship. In the long term commitment and intimacy of husband and wife we potentially can experience something of the wonder of God's call to relationship. A different level of experience is enjoyed with the wider family and friends, with the wider church and world community. God brings us together with all of our differences, not to become the same, but to become one in Christ. By being together we learn about enjoying the other, about sacrifice and patience, even tolerance, about service, about love and pain, about ourselves. We are challenged to change and to care at ever deeper levels. We learn about difference at very practical levels. But it is the key relationships in life that have the most profound impact on us. Where these have been negative they have to be replaced and new models of behaviour learnt. Where they have been positive they have life-long benefit. The current trend in the Western world to sameness – whether it be sub-cultures of music, sport, sexuality, culture, business grouping or anything else that emphasises the superiority of their sameness over others is incredible dangerous and a theological anathema. As God calls us to be uniquely ourselves, but to be at one in holiness with Jesus, so too parents are called similarly. Dads are called to be dads and mums to be mums. No one can replace the other. That is the great tragedy for many of our young people who grow up without close contact with both – whatever the reason. As a people of faith we are blessed to know that God says in Psalm 68:5-6 that He is, "**Father to the fatherless, defender of widows – this is God, whose dwelling is holy**" and that "**God places the lonely in families**". The intrinsic nature or relation of engagement is something that God calls us into because he knows we need it.

The evangelist Billy Graham once noted that, "*A good father is one of the most unsung, unpraised, unnoticed, and yet one of the most valuable assets in our society.*" He wasn't wrong. I had a somewhat messy childhood with my parents separating and divorcing when I was about six years old. We spent a while all over the North Island before coming back to

New Zealand. I didn't see my grand-parents until I was 12 and thereafter lived quite a bit with my grandfather and eventually back home with my mother and step-father. I envied people who had a stable home and parents. When I became a Christian at 18 God became my father. When in my twenties as I really got to know Lorraine's father, John, I had to relearn all my misconceptions about fatherhood. I have learnt so much from him it's a gift from the Lord and one I can never repay. I didn't get to know my own father until I was almost 30 and spending time with him over the last couple of years before he died were some of the most special times of my life.

Proverbs 20:10 says, ***"The righteous man walks in his integrity; His children are blessed after him."*** As we live and when we die we leave a legacy. Not so much in money and material wealth but in who we have been. This legacy is carried by our children more than any other. I am desperately saddened as I have seen countries like Singapore have to pass laws requiring children to look after their elderly parents. The intensity of the workplace ethic has meant that children have grown up having no relationship of any significance with their parents and once they leave home have had no contact whatsoever. In a society without a social welfare system this has led to a social disaster. Many other countries are rapidly heading in the same direction. Or in our own country where divorce and women having children to multiple men has become so common place a recently saw that monogamy is being redefined as one wife at a time in succession. What do we say to this?

We say a simple thing: God's way is the best way. God's way of marital faithfulness is an ideal that everyone should not only aim for but work at diligently. One man, one woman married for life. That takes work. It takes effort. Engaging with difference is not easy. We intrinsically want things our own way. So to come back to today's theme: "God made Fathers" we ask – why? Because Father's have a very special place.

Firstly, we need to recognise that God has given a spiritual headship to men over the family. The spiritual life of the family is a responsibility of men. And in practical terms we see this to be true. Promise Keepers data shows the massively significant role men play in leading their family in faith. When the man is faithful the family almost always is as well. It is one our greatest joys that all of our children have their own strong faith and are more than capable of defending what they believe and sharing it with their friends. In the Jewish home the senior male took a critical role in leading devotions and in the observance of religious festivals, especially Passover. In the Mosaic Law at Deuteronomy 6 God gave very clear instructions to the men of Israel. ***"These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children."*** (Deut 6:6–7). It was Dad's responsibility to both know the Law of God himself and to make sure that his children knew it too. What the child did after thirteen years of age was increasing up to the individual but up until then at least the role of the parents, the Dad in particular, was as spiritual mentor.

But how does one spiritually mentor a child? Charles Spurgeon the English theologian and preacher said, ***"Train up a child in the way he should go—but be sure you go that way yourself."***

