

Father's Day – Copy Me

St. John's Presbyterian, Mt. Roskill

Sermon Topic: Copy Me

Sunday 2nd Sept 2018

Rev. Dr. Colin S. Marshall

Readings: Psalm 128, 1 Kings 2:1-4, Luke 15:11-24, Ephesians 5:23-6:4

Today we celebrate Father's Day and so we should. Fathers' have a vital role to play in a stable and ordered society such as the Lord would want us to work towards building. For a long time, it has been a source of frustration the way fathers have been portrayed on television and in movies as clumsy, unintelligent, providers of genetic material that somehow children have to overcome to reach mature adulthood. From the Flintstones, to Tim the Tool-man Taylor, to the dad of Fresh Prince of Bell Air there was a common pattern. Fortunately, this is beginning to change with this generation, now dads are seen as much more involved in their families, with their wives and children. While I am very much in favour of recognising the rights, talents and abilities of women the liberal left had taken the pendulum too far so that the abused were in danger of becoming the abusers. Unhealthy roles models and stereotypes are being slowly replaced. Thank the Lord that He has provided a vision of what life and family life should be like. In the Kingdom of His redeemed neither male nor female rules over the other but each regard the other with honour, love and respect. On Father's Day we want to recognise the critical role dads have in the family and community and how God intends that role to be played out in real life.

We begin with King David's words to his son Solomon. Knowing that his days were numbered Solomon wanted to make his final words to his son count. He told his son to act like a man; to be strong and do what God requires, walking in obedience being faithful to the Scriptures. You see for King David, who was a man's man, who'd led rebel armies, defied the mad King Saul, conquered thousands of enemies and led the nation to a time of great prosperity, much of it by personal charisma and displays of personal physical strength and valour, true strength lay in his relationship with the Lord. King David knew that all he was capable of was as if nothing if not blessed by the Lord. He'd learnt that salient lesson when he had had Uriah killed and committed adultery with Bathsheba. Nothing he achieved mattered if he didn't also have the Lord's blessing and even his children could be taken away. David had learnt the hard way that faithfulness and peace with God, walking in obedience provided the greatest strength and man could achieve. David wanted his son to be a true man, to have true strength and demonstrate that by walking in the ways of the Lord.

This then is the first goal of every good father, to be a true man, walking in faithfulness to the Lord and in the strength that comes from this. Remember that is the goal. The goal every man should be striving towards. King David's wisdom on his deathbed looked back on his life and the ups and downs, mistakes and victories he had experienced. Every man, in every age, has to make his own discoveries as he seeks to emulate being a true man in his own environment. This is not always easy. Solomon didn't copy many of his father's mistakes, but he did manage to create a few all of his own. Experience is a painful teacher and it is better if we can

learn from those who have gone before but it is not always easy and sometimes it just seems we can find new challenges to face. The old saying is very true ... *“you can’t put an old head on young shoulders”*. Each individual turns theory into reality by doing. How much easier this is when you have a clear guide on methodology and a clear vision of the goal in view. The Lord gives us both through what He calls us to be, through the Word and through older experienced Christians amongst us.

Secondly, a father is a husband. I know that in the realities of today’s society this is not always the case but, in reality, it is if the couple are together. It is somewhat bemusing to me that the state recognises this too for all practical purposes in the current tax regime based not on marriage but by how long you have been co-habiting. God has called for His people to get married, demonstrate and live out their commitment to each other with all its ups and downs. In Ephesians we see very explicit instructions to husbands as to how they are to love their wives – just as Jesus loved the church, willing to give up everything for them. Being a husband works when we understand sacrificial love as Jesus did – it’s a sacrificing of self for the other willingly. This love bears great fruit but is not just the love of the first blooming of relationship or even of the first years of marriage, it is the love that is so often called for in those difficult middle years particularly when work pressures, young children and life in general provide little time together, mental or spiritual space to work things through in a tidy manner. It’s a love that does the hard yards, makes the right choices and sacrifices self in the follow-through, often without a lot of support, just as Jesus had to make choices and follow through in the Garden of Gethsemane and with what followed. It is so sad that many modern couples give up on relationships and never win through to that wonderful place of completely loving and trusting one’s wife or husband and the simple great joy of simply being together. From such relationships much love and joy is shared with others.

Dads are so crucial for children. There is no end of research demonstrating how critically important a dad is at the various stages through a child’s life. No one can fully replace this role. How difficult it is for the many solo mums who do a wonderful job but can never fill that particular space. TV ads that suggest otherwise are unhelpful lies. Dads give adolescent girls self-esteem and self-confidence to engage with males. Dads are a place of safety to retreat to and rely on. They give young men strong role models of behaviour towards woman, particularly as they demonstrate this practically as they love their wives. Children see this behaviour and it gives them confidence and security. Young girls expect from men the behaviour they see demonstrated towards their mother. Love in marriage is why Jesus says that a man loves his wife as his own body – this love is to be so close and so vital to the success of the family and the next generation.

Thirdly, we come to God’s demonstration of the love and compassion of a father for his children in the great parable of the Prodigal Son. We’re not going to go through that parable again today as we looked at it not so long ago. However, we do want to remember that the son had insulted his father as greatly as was possible in Jewish culture effectively calling his father dead, taking his inheritance and leaving. But the father, even so, never gave up on his son, always hoped and prayed for him, always

persevered and waited for him. Ultimately, he would welcome his son back with open arms, clothing, ring and celebrations. The father always looked for the best in his son even, in the midst of his greatest failure. He didn't dictate what the son had to do, to study or to work at, but trusted that God would in time bring things to a proper conclusion. This is one of the strongest models of fatherhood that Jesus has given us. The father is the son's chief supporter, encourager and role-model in life. He is, in effect, "God with hands on" as the expression goes. A wise child learns from the best of their father as the father emulates what he has learnt from God. We see Jesus learning and living this way in John's gospel when he states, from John 5:19, **"truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."** Now without getting into the nature versus nurture debate I can tell you that, like it or not, we do so much of what we have received or learnt from our parents whether we like it or not. How often have you thought *"oh I did that"* or *"I said that and I sound just like dad (or mum)"*? It's a reality of life. This works for better or worse. When a dad (or a mum for that matter) bases their lives on what the Lord wants of them and models their character on what God wants for us then this is what children see. The love they carry for their spouses and their children is caught not taught. Children see through pretence. Children will learn to love as love in family has been demonstrated to them. The love of the prodigal son's father was what the prodigal finally recognised gave him possibilities for the future, even if his thinking was still wrong in intent, he was right in what he hoped for in his father's love.

What can we conclude on this Father's Day in 2018? The role of the father in the community and family is critical. Regardless of how society mocks the role it seems obvious that the lack of fathers in so many families is one real source of society's current moral demise. The role and sexual confusion of so many young men and women is hardly surprising. On a positive note this is a real area of opportunity for Christian fathers to stand out in the community in their sacrificial love for their families. It isn't easy. It needs support. Good dads are a tremendous blessing and continue to grow in their faith and in their roles. So today we give thanks for dads and particularly those dads who do what God always wanted them to do – to be role models who can genuinely say by their actions "copy me" and I will help bring you to the Lord to live life in loving abundance. As our Dads copy and demonstrate God to us, so we learn about our heavenly Father.

And a final p.s. : that makes dad's really important!

Amen.

