

Sermon for Fathers Day 2024
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
June 16, 2024
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13
Psalm 20
2 Corinthians 5:6-17
Mark 4:26-34

Today is Fathers Day.
Thursday will be World Refugee Day – a day to offer prayers
for those who flee their homes to seek safety elsewhere.
Friday will be the Summer Solstice,
the day on which the sun ends its climb northward –
the longest day of the year –
A day to offer prayers for the growth of crops over the summer
that there would be food aplenty.

Interesting lessons for a day on which we honor Fathers.
We have the Hebrew Scriptures telling us of the anointing of a new king. Samuel anoints David,
who is the first in the line on the throne
upon which Jesus will sit as the anointed one, the Christ.
The Psalm tells us not to trust in the strength of men
and the power of the horse, but to call upon the Lord.
Paul writes to the Corinthians that we live in two homes –
in this body here and now,
but also with the Lord who has made all things new.
And the Gospel of Mark has Jesus speaking in parables
about the wonders of growth with the example of the Kingdom of Heaven growing from a mustard
seed into a tree that birds can call home.

Those speak well of the fourth Sunday after Pentecost.
But today is Fathers Day.

We celebrated Mothers Day in May, and in June we celebrate Fathers.
It is not that men or women are one or the other.
Women can be a fathering as men,
just as men can be as mothering as women.
But today we celebrate the fathers in our lives, both biological and spiritual; men (and women) who
have helped us grow into adulthood.

As I was preparing to preach this past week,
I remembered a quote by Mark Twain.

*“When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant
I could hardly stand to have the old man around.
But when I got to be twenty-one,
I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years.”*

Some of us take a little longer to appreciate our fathers.
For men fathers stand in the doorway to our own mortality.
Twain’s comment reminded me also of a poem by A.E. Housman,
which was written in the late 1800s.

*When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say,
‘Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away;
Give pearls away and rubies
But keep your fancy free.’
But I was one-and-twenty,
No use to talk to me.
When I was one-and-twenty
I heard him say again,
‘The heart out of the bosom
Was never given in vain;
’Tis paid with sighs a plenty
And sold for endless rue.’
And I am two-and-twenty,
And oh, ’tis true, ’tis true.*

When I was just 20 my father and mother and sister and brother
drove me from Indiana to San Francisco
to attend a week of small arms training
before I was to embark (now it's called deploy) for Vietnam.
One evening we went to dinner and my brother chose to stay at the motel. When we returned my
father walked in
to find my brother smoking a cigarette, and my father just lost it.
He screamed at my brother relentlessly
as if he had violated some sacred taboo.

I don’t think it was about smoking.
My brother was 18. He had graduated high school.
I believe my father was angry about escorting his eldest son off to war
and he was unable to say what he wanted to say to me,
whatever those words might have been.
“I love you. I fear for you. I am proud of you. Please come home.”
He could only release his anger at a safe target – my brother,
who would live.
My family drove me from San Francisco to McCord Air Force Base, Washington,
and waved as I boarded the plane for Vietnam.
None of us believed we would ever see each other again.

I came back.

As I finished the first draft of this sermon, I rewarded myself by watching the final episodes of my favorite TV series, *Young Sheldon*. My wife and I had watched *The Big Bang Theory* for its run. We used to compare notes and listen to physicist friends comment on the formulae on the white boards. So it was easy to jump into *Young Sheldon*. It was fitting for a Fathers Day sermon. I knew what was coming but that didn't spare me from the tears. The show's creator Chuck Lorre always wrote "Ego Notes" at Big Bang episodes, and the practice continued. He commented that in writing *The Big Bang Theory* the creators thought it clever to have Sheldon's teenage years disturbed by his father's death. Little did they realize how much they would regret the decision when the unforeseen *Young Sheldon* series played out that decision – to kill off a character who had become a beloved father.

Sheldon copes by imagining all the ways in which the last time he saw his father could have gone differently in alternative realities. He could have said, goodbye; he could have asked to ride along with him; he could have told his father how much he loved him – but he didn't.

It's somehow strange to shed tears for a fictional character, but then again often we see our own lives better from a distance.

That man whose life stood between me and eternity died just as the world shut down for Covid. I did not have the chance to say goodbye, to tell him I loved him one last time. We had to wait to years to bury his ashes along side my mother. I miss them both and love them still.

We are called to love one another.
Like the mustard seed our children grow to become the future.
We are called to teach our children of God's love for them,
and the love they must share with each other as a gift to the world.

A tune kept coming to mind all this week as I prepared for Fathers Day. All of us of a certain age remember Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. Graham Nash wrote the lyrics for the song, *Teach your Children*.

The lyrics that seem apropos come from separate verses.
There's the call for parents to *Teach your children well*
And a parallel call for children to *Teach your parents well*

And a plea asks the young to give their elders a break;

*And you of tender years
Can't know the fears that your elders grew by*

And the chorus returns for each and the other.

*Don't you ever ask them why
If they told you, you would cry
So just look at them and sigh
And know they love you*

And the words repeat for emphasis:

And know they love you

And remember, God loves us all.

If you don't remember it, the link to the lyrics are:

<http://www.metrolyrics.com/teach-your-children-lyrics-crosby-stills-nash.html>

If you prefer you can see the performance at"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkaKwXddT_I