

Calvary United Methodist Church
June 16, 2019

CREATE A LEGACY
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

Luke 1:5-17

I'd like to invite our children to come up for the Children's Message. We have a few children here this morning. Good morning. Good to have you here this morning. How was your week? You are finished with school now? That's a good feeling, isn't it? (Child speaks.) No? You miss it already? Come on in close, if you can.

Today in our Children's Message we are going to talk a little bit about this special day we have. It is? (Father's Day.) Are you doing anything special today? (Child speaks.) You are making Dad a surprise? What is it? Oh, that's a secret. I'm glad I didn't blow that. (Child speaks.) You are going to be eating candy? Well, that sounds like a good thing to do. Are you going to share it with your dad? (Yeah.)

Well, fathers and mothers are gifts to us, but today is the father's day and it's a day that we recognize them and thank them for their presence in our lives because they have a lot of witnessing. They are a testimony to us. Those are kind of big words. It's like they are an example of how we should live our lives: how to love and to play and to have fun. And they teach us so many things, not all at one time, of course, but as we grow in years and in knowledge we learn a lot from our mothers and fathers.

Some of us are at the point of our age because we get older than our fathers that are gone. But I remember the many things my father has taught me in life and I cherish them because...how many of you like to get a gift? Most people like gifts because as we get older you will cherish them as gifts...the knowledge and the wisdom and the experience and the love and the love and the love because you can't get enough of a good thing.

You see, for some people today coming to this church on today is a difficult day because their fathers are gone. But for me, even though it's been 15 years, I can say I get sad and I miss my father, but when I think of him, I'm happy, because it reminds me of all the great things fathers are. I can remember clear back when I was a little boy and my father would take me for hikes. See, all these lessons that fathers give us through life are to help us to grow up to be the adults that we can be.

So, there is a scripture I would like to read today from Luke: Many of the children of Israel shall turn to the Lord, their God, and He shall go before them in Spirit and the power of Elias to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient and the wisdom to the just to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

This Word is basically saying that the hearts...our fathers have heart and you know where it really starts out? Can you imagine yourself as a little baby? You can't remember that far back. We really can't remember when we were just that newborn baby because our minds don't quite take us, but at some point your fathers and your mothers probably held you like this, they would look into your eyes and you know what they said? "Thank you, God. Thank you, God, for this gift." You are all a special gift from God and as they look on us they thought, "I have the power to shape them."

The words you hear, the love they share, the celebrations and the experiences, they are all great things. And pretty soon you are not that infant, you grow up to be a little bigger and you are playing and giggling and playing games. And all of a sudden you are the little toddler and you are walking and you are doing things with your father. And some of you, someone from the last service was going to the beach today. And they look at you and say, "I love you. I want you to stay away from the water unless I'm with you," right? Because they want to protect us. That's a rule.

And sometimes as the sunsets, you are reminded: I'm going to be strong like my dad. Are you going to do that? Are you going to get strong like your moms and dads and learn all those many things that we could play with and do?

I want to review a few of the things that I did with my father, and I bet some of you have done some of them. My father took me fishing as a little boy. Did you ever do that? Now, I was quite a sucker. One time I wasn't catching anything in a pond of water and someone tied a can of sardines on the end. I actually thought I caught sardines, but we'll let that go. I was a slow learner. But fishing was a fun thing.

Sometimes my father liked to build things and he left me learn by watching. Sometimes my father liked to cook and bake and I learned by watching. Sometimes I lived around farms and we had backhoes and bulldozers and I got to playing big boy toys even when I was little.

And all of those things reminded me of how wonderful it was. But one of the greatest memories I had was Dad taking me to church and I thought about that just a week or so ago when I wrote this, but then this morning I remembered a memory of a long time ago on a wintry day. Now, we don't want to think of snow right now, but it was a snowy morning in my little town and our church was in town and I lived out of town and the roads were mostly closed and people weren't going anywhere. And my father took me to church and we got there and there was only one person there: the preacher. And the good news was when you are a little boy in a little country church we took at times turns ringing the church bell. Now we don't have a church bell like that that we ring here, but because I was at church, I got to ring the bell. And the minister shared storied with us of faith. It was a short service and I went home, but I have never forgotten how important it was that my mother and my father taught me to pray, taught me to love God, taught me to help other people.

And so as I grew, I wanted to grow up to be like my father and my mother because together they helped shape me. My father gave me the greatest gift anyone could give another person: he believed in me. Your mothers and fathers love you so much and they believe in you to grow up and to be the person that you ought to be for God.

There is a scripture in Malachi: He will turn the hearts of the parents to the children, and the hearts of the children to the parents.

And some day we are going to sing that song, I like it very much because he wants to turn all of our heart to God and all of our hearts to one another that we might truly praise God, that we might have strength in God and that we might find our place, whatever that might be, to make a difference in the Kingdom because we'll find our peace knowing that our fathers and our mothers have done a great job.

Now, I said before, sometimes people come on this day and it's very sad. I get sad but you know what I do? I thank God for those memories. It's okay to cry, you know that? I want you to know it's okay to cry, even for boys to cry because it says, "I love someone and I miss them so very much." But when I cry and get it all out, here's what happens next: I get a happy face because I remember my dad in heaven looking upon me saying, "Keep going. Keep being a light for other people." And you and I need to do that always. We need to be happy and we need to be with light and we need to praise God for our God is so good.

Thank you all for coming up this morning and God bless you.

Message:

I would like to talk a little bit about what it is to leave a legacy. We all have a legacy, but what do you want it to look like? We have the privilege as men and women of God to leave a legacy that will never never be forgotten by those around us.

Father's Day has always been a difficult time for me since I lost my father 15 years ago. But I told the children, I do get a grip and thank God for the memories I have. My father was an average man coming from a very large family. He was no dummy. He had an 8th grade education, but in my mind he was Superman, he could do everything and anything possible and I don't know how people of that time did it, but my mother was the same way. Somehow they figured it out and they made a way for things to happen and raise children. And you know what it took? Love. And you know what it took beyond God's love? God. My parents depended on God and if there is a legacy we want to leave to our children, it's not about my strength and my wisdom and my power and my glory, it's to follow God Almighty, the One who will never fail us, because as much as I love my father and mother, there were times they weren't always there when I needed them, right? Let's be honest, as much as they love you and try, your parents aren't attached to your hips. My parents did far more for me than I

could have ever imagined or even hoped for, but God has done even more and we need to remember what it is to have a Heavenly Father who looks over us.

I wanted a glimpse into fatherhood from our children and youth so about a month ago I went down to the confirmation class and others and asked for some of their thoughts of fathers. These are their comments:

A person that loves you and takes care of you...that's a great father that can do that.

A father is someone who cares about you. They spend time with you and love you, but most importantly, he lives a life as an example for children...wow! People are watching, right? Our children mimic us...why it is so important that...be careful of the words, right? Where your feet take you, where your hands take you, where your eyes and your lips and you speak. Children are watching and they need to see an example of our Heavenly Father coming out of the earthly fathers. A special person in your life.

A dad is someone who loves you no matter what, who takes care of you, who provides for you, who spends time with you, even though, I love this honesty, he's rather be doing something else.

We know sometimes fathers, like mothers, sacrifice to do what needs to be done because: if I choose to have a child I need to be the father.

A dad is someone who loves you, takes care of you and supports you no matter what.

A dad is a male role model who is always there, not only in the good times, but the bad times as well. He is someone who loves you with all his heart and would do anything to make you happy. That's a dad.

When I look at scriptures, I look at these and am reminded that God tells us what it is to take care of our mother and father and I know when pastors speak on loving mothers and fathers there are always those in the congregations who have had those hurtful experiences of fathers and mothers who were worse than negligent...they were abusive. And to that we pray for God's grace to bring healing, because our Heavenly Father set up an example of what it is to be a loving father, that we might pass that on to generation after generation that will bring healing and bring new life and bring hope and bring promise and create generations of new people.

This week I saw a quote from Mother Teresa. She said: If you really want to change the world, love your children. Boy! That's pretty powerful, because if you raise children who have known the light of Christ and they grow up to be Christ-like guess what? They won't be bullies, they won't be mean, they won't be nasty, they won't be going down the wrong path. They will be following the light of Christ by you loving your children.

Honor your mother and your father? Well the scripture goes on, why should we do that? So that it may go well with you, that you may enjoy long life on earth. Some of you have had those parents, you know that it wasn't going to go well if you didn't honor your mother and father.

Our mother and father discipline and sometimes as children and teens we don't understand that. Discipline isn't to harm us. Correction discipline, it gets a bad rap nowadays. It's to set our feet on a path. That's why parents can't really be friends until you are out of school and a little older. They are your parents. They are here to direct you. They have been down the road and some of them, some of us as parents have made mistakes. You have gone down wrong roads and so your wisdom is there to try to protect our children, to try to get them on the right path.

I am reminded of this direction every time we have a baptism, I see a baptism or think of baptism of the importance of the fatherly role and motherly role in raising children. Every time a child is brought forth, pastors ask a lot of questions of them, when they meet with the family and then of you and the parents. Will you see that this child is taught the Holy Scriptures and private and public worship? Will you see that they understand what it is to be a part of the fellowship of worship? There are all those questions we ask and they are so important because if we do that, there is something that happens that is marvelous: they grow up and when they are a teenager and you say, "Would you like to join your church?" Well, of course, because they have known God, they have known God's love, they have known God's desire, they've known what it is to be a part of this family.

There is a scripture that is shared for those who wonder the importance of children: If anyone causes one of the little ones to believe in me to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone around their neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Those are pretty harsh words from a God that says: This is how much it is important to care for your children. Most of us don't know what a millstone is: it's this big rock that two of them would grind together to grind stuff. And so, when God says, "I'm giving you..." Every time I see this little gift, I cry. I can't go into a neonatal unit without crying. I can't do it. The miraculous things of this sperm and egg come together and form this child that will have a heart beating perhaps for 90 or 100 years, these little toes and fingers and mind that grow and develop into the people we are today. God says: this is yours as a gift. And when that family has that child baptized and the baptism takes place, there is another word: the pastor always asks you, the church: Now, will you on behalf of the family of God...not just Calvary, God's people everywhere...will you do all in your part to love this child, to make sure that they grow in the number and the wisdom of God, that they become faithful children of God. That's a huge responsibility when you say, "Yes." And that's why we meet here, because we together want to bring this family, not Calvary alone, the family of God, the Kingdom of God, to grow and grow until this earthly kingdom can look like God's kingdom, that we learn to love and accept and support and encourage one another. What a gift from God to be able

to do that; to place our trust in God, to say, “God you have taken me through the storms, I know you will be there with me in the future.” And we do that here at Calvary every day in every ministry we do, that we might lift up the light of Christ, that our children will grow in his knowledge.

And so the question is asked at those baptisms: Will you do it? I’ve never been in a church that says, “No.” We say, “Yes, Lord. We will do this,” because we are reminded of the baptism of Jesus when he came out of the water and God said, “This is my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” And he has transformed the world.

Turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, we live in a day and age where we are fractured in so many ways. Our culture has become mean, become ugly, we say bad things about one another. We don’t support, we don’t encourage and this God is saying: First, turn your hearts to God and then turns your hearts to this younger generation that they won’t see the vile and the ugliness because you know why? When I ask people will you raise this child, here’s what the people look like. It’s not just his family. I don’t care if you go to Asia or Central America or South America, to the North Pole, the South Pole, if you wear the label of Christ, Christian, someone is watching you and you are the living example of the birthing of Christ. Children don’t have all they take at that young age. They are malleable. They are being shaped and molded by what they see, what they hear, what they do.

As parents we don’t usually put a child right behind the steering wheel, do we? You see a few in the news that try that once in a while. But what we do, we mold them and shape them so that they can mature. They will mature to bicycles and tricycles and they will mature in their learning of cooking and chores around the home. They mature in their years and they need to mature in their spiritual wellness. We as parents have an awesome responsibility to teach our children to pray, to teach our children the Word of God, to teach them to serve, to teach them to give because when we do that, not only is their world transformed, the world around them is transformed. The more we are with God’s people who are trying to earn our way to God, not earn, that’s a bad word. It’s by God’s grace, but the more we are into that grace the more our children will find out that we have a peace and that we confess that we are not perfect and we can grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ and we can say: it is well with my soul. It is well.

Scripture from Proverbs 22 is one that I have seen lived out so many times in my ministry: Train up a child in the way they should go and when they are old the will not depart from it.

Scriptures are often filled with promises that we don’t see at the immediate moment. I’m always filled when I see the families at the church bring their children to so many functions, when I see them growing and I know they have the knowledge of Christ and I know they are praying. Why? Because I’m an old pastor and as I get older, I see this: I remember those teenage years and some of you, if you look back, you will remember those years as well. They weren’t easy. Did you ever remember: I don’t want to go to church; I don’t want to do

this; I don't want to do that and you struggle with your parents? Well, most people go through that time when they walk away from the church for a while, but this is a pastor and someone who comes in and I've had this so many times and I thank God for it. Someone will come in to my office, they have been out of a church, and they say: You don't know me, I've been out of the church for 10 or 15 years, but I'm getting married. Or maybe they are married and they come in and say: We've decided we want to have children. I remember what it was like to raise my children and grow up in the church. I want my children to be a part of that church.

Traineth a child in the way of the Lord and they will not depart from it when they are older. Why? Because they remember VBS, that we have this week. They remember teachers and people who loved them. They remember messages. They remember celebrations at Christmas and Easter. They remember the love of God. They remember the forgiveness. They remember the grace and they say: As for me and my family, I want them to be a part of Christ. And so they come and the church welcomes them again and their little children come into Christ and they are celebrating in those teen years so that when they get to the older years they know the saints of heaven are with them. This is why we come here. It's who we are, as a part of a family of God that we might seek God together.

And we do that when we put God first. But there are a lot of times when we don't put God first. I am going to run you down that channel a little bit. If you get a chance this week, read the books of first and second Kings. God had a plan: love me and me alone. And the people said, "Oh, Lord, we want some earthly leaders." He said, "I'll give you what you want. I'm going to give you some kings and queens and in our case presidents and you are not going to be happy." You see, all throughout history there are those who are good kings and queens and presidents and there are those who are not so good and those who follow God have a great lineage and a great legacy and those who don't have a terrible one.

We have different roads we can go down. I want to give you an example of a bad. 1 Kings: Now, Nadab, the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel for the second year of Asa, king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel for two years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord and he walked in the way of his father in his sin by which he had made Israel sin. Evil. Evil. It doesn't always happen that way, but when you don't have a good image and you don't have a good father and you don't have someone that is walking you on the path of righteousness, it's easy to go down the wrong path.

But there is another path: the higher road costs, but it's the path of righteousness.

In the 27th year of Jeroboam, King of Israel, Azariah, the son of Amaziah, the King of Judah became king and imagine this: He was 16 years old when he became king and he reined 52 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem and he did what was right in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father Amaziah had done. He did right, his father did right and the kingdoms grew. Folks, mothers and fathers, we need to do right.

And God will bless us. There are those, even if we try our darnedest to go off the stray, but the more we are committed to Christ, the more we share Christ with those around us, the more we are the fathers and mothers that we ought to be. God will bless those on our list.

Dr. George Rectors says this about a father: a positive and continued relationship with one's father has been found to be associated with a good self-concept, higher self-esteem, higher self-confidence in personal and social interaction, higher moral maturity, reduced rates of unwed teen pregnancy, greater internal control, higher career aspirations. Fathers who are affectionate, nurturing and actively involved in childrearing are more likely to have well-adjusted children. I'm not surprised.

Parenting is an awesome responsibility, whether it be single or together, you can still be a good parent and the result will be children who grow up knowing they are loved and nurtured in Jesus Christ.

Used to hear these comments from adults: make sure that you do your parents right. Remember? You were told that. Now, don't embarrass me. Put on your dress clothes, look right, right? Well, we do that not only for our earthly fathers. We need to do the right thing for our heavenly father.

In Sierra Leone, the common name that I hear for God isn't "Father" as much as "Papa." It's very personal: Papa God. Papa God's love never changes. Papa God's love is always consistent. No matter what I have done, no matter where I have been, God is with me and God is with you and I want you to know that today. Our Heavenly Father is unlike our earthly fathers. As much as we try, earthly fathers will fail. Our Heavenly Father is the One who wants to bring healing to our like and we need to remember that there is always a place for healing in our life and we need to determine our future path.

Abraham Lincoln said this: The best way to predict our future is to create it. We are a part of the creation of everyone's future we deal with, not just our children. People at our workplace, people in our sports and activities, people that are neighbors who don't have much to do with. People watch and we are to be the people creating a legacy that others might see that we are made of Christ, that we are the people who will be healers.

Church, I have to say sometimes when I read things on Facebook and I see on the news...I saw something from one of my family the other day, it was just horrid, cursing and foul language, bad examples, judgement, condemnation. The list could go on. We as people of God must be bigger than this because people see us walking into places like churches and they say: Really? That's a Christian? What they do, what they say, how they act, what they put in print. We are people who are healers and must take a high road. We must be the forgiving, graceful people as much as the father and the prodigal son who when his son came home embraced him. And when we embrace one another and embrace Almighty God, God is honored. Our fathers and mothers are honored and we are a reflection of God's life.

Our children are wanting to hold on to our hands. Our children are wanting us to take them to a better place and you and I have the privilege to be the kind of parents and examples of Christ that God will empower us to be.

Thanks be to God that He would trust us with such a gift. Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, you have given us so much and there are times we forget that it is all from you. No matter how much we work and strive, all good gifts come from your hands and so we praise you and thank you. We thank you for the children, not only our blood children and those we received in our family, but all of God's children around this globe. May we be the people who exemplify your love and grace and mercy at all time. We ask in your Holy Name. Amen.