Father’s Day Psalms

Psalm 68:4-6; 78:1-8; 103:11-18; 127 Kimby Young

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The sermon series on the Psalms gave me a theme for this Father’s Day sermon. And I will say – this is one way of studying and reading the Psalms. In addition to studying the Psalms in order 1 to 150, or by types as I introduced last week – praise Psalms, laments, and so on. Another way is to study the Psalms topically or by theme. Choose a theme – love, peace, justice, nature, courage – and read through Psalms that talk about this topic to see what inspires you. So today’s topical study of the Psalms is about Fathers.

The Psalms we just heard - all talk about Fathers – their compassion, their purpose in teaching and providing for children, and the guidance God gives faithful Fathers for building a strong and fruitful household. Two of the Psalms also speak of God as Father. The ultimate care giver and example we have in God Almighty – Father of the fatherless, Father of every person in the entire world, our own father. We know God’s love as a father – the most intimate caring love we can imagine. We are children of God, heirs of God’s kingdom. We inherit gifts from God. And by learning from God, just as all children learn from their parents – by learning from God how to love and care, we can learn to be the best possible people we can be. Fathers can model their own fatherhood on God’s fatherhood – on the sacrificial, unending and unconditional love of our God. It is a tall order – to be like God. But that kind of love is what God believes we are capable of giving. We can love like God loves. We try to follow Jesus. We try to reflect the image of God which God created us to be. Today we honor that kind of love.

Fatherhood is all over the Bible. There are countless passages and stories describing what makes a good father. Or for that matter what illustrates a bad father. In most cases a good father is one who models faithfulness. We can think of countless fathers throughout the Bible. Likewise, from Genesis to Revelation, God is referred to as Father or in images that reflect being a good father. We of course know Jesus called God Father or Abba – which is a very tender intimate familial name like Daddy. It is as natural for us to call God Father as it is to call Jesus Christ. It helps us to understand who God is. Father God is a part of our every day language. Very familiar and very fitting. We know what it means

In today’s scripture from the Psalms, there are several references to fatherhood. I want to look at the Psalms one by one. But instead of taking them in chronological order, we will continue to think thematically – about how the Psalms relate to fathers.

So let’s begin with the last Psalm 127. This Psalm is only 5 verses long and so it is one of the shorter Psalms in our Bible. It is probably also one of our older Psalms and is built on the model of Wisdom Psalms – like the proverbs. In some ways, the verses are separate thoughts strung together that are not completely connected. Psalm 127 begins by giving advice about how to be a good father or head of household – that is to invite God to build the house. God should build every house and guard every city. God should be in charge. So a good father is one who recognizes God’s leadership and not only goes where God leads, but encourages the whole household to follow God. The last part of the Psalm is a reflection on the joy of fatherhood. Sons are a heritage and a reward from God. This does reflect the times. Today we would say sons and daughters are a blessing from God – a delight now and the source of blessing for the future. The last line about “not being put to shame” is the ultimate goal of life in that day in many ways. To be honored would bring happiness. The Psalm uses rather utilitarian language – comparing children to arrows in a quiver. Useful and purposeful. The more you have the better. I don’t think the analogy holds that children are expendable like arrows or have no will of their own. But the image is descriptive. Everyone would know the what quiver full of arrows looks like, how hard it was to come by, and how useful that would be. Again, times have changed – we have other ways of measuring honor and value today. But the overall sentiment stands – children are a blessing. Fathers can be proud of their families. And back to the first verse – God should be the center of the household. God builds our families and strengthens our households. Good mothers and fathers follow God’s lead.

Psalm 78 is the other Psalm that gives advice about fatherhood. We did not hear the whole Psalm in fact there are 72 verses. These first verses talk about how important it is to teach children about God, to tell people about the history of our faith and to instruct families in God’s ways. In fact the rest of those 72 verses do seem to be a kind of history lesson about some particular incident in the history of Israel. If you remember that the Psalms were originally music – you can almost hear the verses that follow as the ballad of Egypt and Israel and the God most high. But these first verses that we heard today are the introduction – and they concentrate on how important it is for parents to teach their children, that the next generation will know all about God and will follow God’s ways. And in the last verses – the cautionary tale about what happens if you don’t teach your children – how the generation will be lost. Bottom line for fathers and parents today is verse 4 – “we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord and God’s might; and the wonders that God has done.” That’s the first and best job of parents – to teach faithfulness. The best way to do that is by living faithfully.

The other two Psalms for today describe God as father. Psalm 68 describes God as father of the fatherless, protector of orphans and widows. God gives the desolate a home to live in. Clearly – God adopts us and cares for us. God favors those who are most in need. God protects and provides, shelters and sustains. God loves like a father. This we know to be true. Those who did not have a good father on earth – most definitely have a welcoming father in God. And we who were blessed with wonderful fathers here, recognize that love in God. We are grateful for the care and comfort of a God who loves us. This is good news for everyone. Thanks be to God.

The last of today’s Psalms is Psalm 103. And again we heard only a few verses from a much longer Psalm of Thanksgiving to God our Creator and Redeemer, in the context of our mortal lives of dust. “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is God’s steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.” These verses are traditionally used after a prayer of confession and in fact I used them that way this morning in our assurance of pardon. We remember how much God loves us and how far God will go to save us. To illustrate that overwhelming amazing selfless love – the Psalm uses the example of the good father. “As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for us.” We know what that means. Think of the compassion of a good father – the passion, the power, the tenderness, the forgiveness, the guidance, the giving – the love of a good father. We know what that means. God loves us like a good father loves – and even more than we can imagine. So God loves us.

On this Father’s day, we understand the love of God. We see the love of God reflected in the loving fathers around us, and we give thanks. So as you go out today. If you are a father – thank you. And as scripture advises – model your fatherhood on the love of God our father. If you are able to speak to or see your father today – again, give thanks to God for you are most richly blessed. If today you are missing a father, or did not have a good father in your life, know now and always that you are loved by God in ways that cannot be measured or contained. God offers all of us grace this day and throughout our lives. Share that joy and blessing today, any way you are able. In the name of the father, and of the son and of the holy spirit. Amen.