

## ‘God the Father’

*Psalm 112; Psalm 103:1-13; Luke 12:22-32*

June 21, 2020

Jesus Christ talks about the Fatherhood of God here in the Gospel of Luke –

*“Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap; they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?’*

*Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.’”*

One of the things I’ve truly enjoyed about coming back into the Presbyterian Church (USA) after serving a non-denominational church for many years is our Order of Worship. To my thinking, we’ve got a way of doing worship which makes sense. We pray, we confess our sin and receive forgiveness, we read Scripture and we recite Creeds. Chief among those Creeds we recite many Sundays is the Apostles’ Creed.

The opening words of the Apostles’ Creed tell us quite a bit about God if we’ll listen to them. “I believe in God,” we proclaim. And then we immediately go on to describe God with a few very simple words. I believe in God, the FATHER ALMIGHTY, maker of heaven and earth.

The Apostles’ Creed affirms that we have a deity who is BOTH ALMIGHTY AND FATHER who has in his omnipotence and his care created all that we’ll every experience on this third rock from the sun.

In a proof for God’s existence which still draws attention in both philosophical and theological circles, 11<sup>th</sup> century Christian thinker Anselm of Canterbury once surmised that an Almighty God was, “that of which nothing greater can be thought of.” And so to get to the idea of a truly Almighty God, you’d imagine the greatest most powerful thing ever.

Like, maybe you think about, I dunno, Godzilla. But as powerful as Godzilla is, can something defeat him? Well, yes, Mothra right? So, you can eliminate Godzilla from being God, and, let’s just say a word of thanks for that.

So, on and on you think until you can imagine nothing greater.

That, in a sense, is what we speak of when we talk of God’s almightiness. Psalm 97 captures for me in words the almighty nature of our God.

*“The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth.”*

That last part, the mountains melt like wax before the Lord, man, that’s power.

Yet, omnipotence can feel impersonal, maybe even intimidating; before raw power, we cower. Christian theologian Jürgen Moltmann, nailed it writing, *“Omnipotence can be feared, but never loved.”*

Taken apart, those descriptive words may cause us problems.

Y’all remember that Ford ad series from a few years back? I think the catchphrase was, “And is better” or something like that. Two people zipping around would be talking about how they liked the fact that the Ford they were driving was both stylish and fuel efficient. Then, they’d say something like, AND is better and they’d show like a scene at a Chinese restaurant where these people were grimacing, having to eat just SOUR chicken as opposed to sweet AND sour chicken. The idea was that it was always better to have both good things as being forced to choose on or the other.

They were funny and they draw our attention to the fact that, as it relates to God in His almightiness and in His Fatherliness, it truly is better to have both.

But it isn't that God is just this almighty being who has created heaven and earth. God isn't just powerful in an either-or way. God is both almighty and also our Father.

The idea of Fatherhood though, is sort of, well, I don't know, out of fashion right now in a lot of ways. Within some quarters, to call God Father reeks of toxic masculinity at some level. Further, we don't much like the idea of anyone telling us what to do or judging us by some set standards.

But these days, maybe we really don't want that. We want a best-friend as a parent, someone who green lights whatever we conjure up. Short of that, we want no parental involvement at all and so a great many in our society have abandoned the idea of a strong, parenting God.

PhD in education William W. Purkey once penned the words "You've gotta dance like no one is watching," years ago in a book he wrote on leadership. Do what you're gonna do, don't matter what others think.

Now, without question, he meant these words to be liberating, freeing people from an unhealthy fixation on other people's opinions. And yet, at the same time, the saying subtly reinforces an idea that a great many of our friends and neighbors already hold. Many folks we encounter every day live under the belief that we're all alone out here in the universe. No one is really watching us with loving eyes.

But here's the rub, A nonexistent God can't enter our hearts and our lives to cure us, strengthen us, really do anything at all to or with us.

This world-view entails a form of soul-crushing existentialism in which we're forever and eternally all alone. We have no real FATHER IN HEAVEN.

And the lonely nature of this world view, well, it's killing a great many of us. Rates of depression, anxiety, debilitating perfectionism, narcissism, suicide, you name it are all on the rise. And why wouldn't they be? When you're all alone in the world, you've got to stake your own claim. When you're all alone in the world, your reputation means everything. When you're all alone in the world, you've got to be constantly fearing when the other shoe is going to fall, right? It's a terrifying dance in which each day is fraught with peril.

My sense is technology is only amplifying our self-focus as well as our fear.

No kidding y'all, I know a woman who has taken up a hobby over the last several years. But, here's the thing - she doesn't really enjoy it all that much. It would be kind of humorous if it weren't for why she's doing it. It turns out she's doing it to have neat pictures to share with her followers on Facebook. It didn't matter to her so much that she didn't enjoy what she was doing recreationally so long as other people perceived she was having fun.

That's a pretty big disconnect which is being duplicated all over the place in this time and age. In a very real way, social media makes us all brand managers. The product, us. We live on a tightrope between success and failure. The stakes are high and more often than not we crumple under the weight of our own ludicrous expectations.

In a very real way, with the rise of social media, our pulling away from belief in God and our desire to dance like nobody is watching is alienating us more deeply from ourselves, from others and from our God. It's a terrible place to be. *Friends, when we don't have a Father in Heaven caring about us, we are beholden to every other opinion under the sun.*

So, what better day than Father's Day to recall that we aren't all alone in this universe. That there is somebody watching and this is an almighty, personal God who we can call FATHER. We call Him Father because we are His children and He loves us dearly. So dearly that He sent the Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save us from ourselves.

But what is Fatherhood? What are its' defining traits? How do we recognize a good father from a bad one?

Knowing that I had a Father's Day sermon coming up, a few years ago I began asking the children what they thought of when they heard the word father.

I figured that as a function of their age, they'd be the perfect ones to reflect upon fatherhood. Thankfully, aside from Lillian reminding me that Fathers and I quote "dig through your poop when you

swallow a penny” the kids nailed it. They said essentially that fathers provide protection, care, feeding, understanding. Ben, who is as precious to me as the day is long, even understood that Fathers have to steer you in the right direction and discipline you when necessary.

I am, quite blessed when it comes to Dads as I have a great one. Some of my most precious memories of childhood are spending time with my Dad. I learned so many. Things from him. I try to model that level of care and compassion for my kids when I’m with them.

But to say my Dad was perfect isn’t accurate. I can’t help but remember the time when my Mom was out of town, Dad’s big idea for dinner was to mix canned Chef Boy’Ardee spaghetti with canned Chef Boy’Ardee mac and cheese. This concoction would have been bad enough on its own but he accidentally burned it and then served it to us with only the most obvious char scraped off.

And I’m just like Dad, far from perfect. I can’t help but remember the time I sent with my son and my daughter with Natalie to a birthday party in Gastonia which was actually happening in Huntersville, a totally different location than I told them it was. I want to be perfect, but I’m not, even as a Father.

*Isn’t it good to know that we have a Father in heaven who makes no mistakes and that is, even now, a powerful and comforting presence in our daily lives?*

We speak of God as Father as a reflection of God’s loving nature. To say that God is Father is to say that we’re His children. We belong to someone. If I have a father, I’m not an orphan and neither are you.. We’re not left alone in the world.

Now look, I know that not everyone in the world had the best father growing up. But one of the things the Bible shows us is what our Father in Heaven is like and even if we didn’t have a good father, we have the greatest Father of all in our God.

Note that Jesus calls God Father and speaks of Him personally.

But what does that mean?

Well, it means that we can communicate with Him. That this God we worship and call Father is capable not only of hearing us, but he is also able to speak back to us, to answer our prayers. *To worship and proclaim as Lord a God who we call father means that we are never alone, never apart from an eternal love which was operative before creation was created and will still be working as the Kingdom comes and we’re joined with all the faithful forever and ever in the paradise of heaven.*

To have God as our Father means that, when push comes to shove, we can rely on an inconceivable strength. There’s a great old Warren Zevon song that I used to love. It talks about getting into trouble down in Cuba. The chorus then thunders in saying – **“Send lawyers, guns and money, DAD GET ME OUT OF THIS.”** Amen when it comes to God our Father!

Isn’t it good to know that when push comes to shove, we have God the Father to rely on for assistance?

This is the God who parted the sea so his people could flee from tyranny.

Rained manna from heaven so His people could eat.

Produced water from a rock so His people could drink.

Raised from the dead a widow’s only son so she would be provided for in her old age.

Protected three of his faithful from a fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar.

And then, when the fullness of time arrived, God loved us so much that he gave us His only begotten Son.

Now look, I know that we can amble along on most days and never seem to require the kind of strength God alone offers us. And that’s good, I guess. But let me assure you, the day will come, if it hasn’t already, in which our human strength will be insufficient to the task at hand. Or perhaps our emotional resources will not be equal either. In those moments, we who worship a Fathering God know beyond a shadow of a doubt will not fall into the abyss. Rather we will be lifted up by our Fathering God. Hear the words of Isaiah 40 – Have you not heard?

***“The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”***

God our Father gives us access to his comfort and his strength in times of trouble.

To have God as our Father means that HE is, now and always, our ROCK, our very present help in times of trouble.

Just like a good father, when the world seems bleak and scary, it's then where are Father steps into the light, takes us by the hand and says those words that only he can truly say with certainty – "It's all going to be all right."

Father's care for us, they provide for us the necessities like "daily bread" so too do they care for us during tempestuous times. But they also guard us in other ways. By laying down rules and enforcing them.

One time, when Benji was just a little guy, like 2 years old or so, I took him with me to get a cell phone looked at. As we were walking out of the store, Benji goes tearing off into the parking lot at full tilt without any regard whatsoever about cars. In that moment, I summoned my deepest, sternest, most fatherly voice and I yelled out BENJAMIN STOP! Thanks be to God, the voice and concern that it clearly carried with it stopped him in his tracks.

God our Father is like that with us as well, he's constantly calling out to us, guiding us with his Word and with his Spirit. When we come close to the edge, we hear his voice, sternly coming to us at times saying "STOP." "DON'T DO THIS." "FIND ANOTHER WAY."

I can recall a time in my life when I was convinced that no matter whatever it was I wanted to do as a teenager, my Dad's answer was going to be NO. I remember this one time when all my friends were going skiing up at Sugar Mountain to ski and "party." I wanted to go so badly but, as per usual, my dad said NO. Wouldn't you know it, a whole lot of that group got arrested and I'd have been there right with them. Now, at 48, I realize that many of my Dad's nos were tangible examples of his love.

So too is it with our heavenly Father. I'm sure everyone here can remember an occasion when they knew that what they were about to be was wrong. But, perhaps at the last moment, we just didn't go through with it. Deep down inside us, we'd heard that voice of God saying "STOP." "DON'T DO THIS!" "FIND ANOTHER WAY. And in retrospect, we couldn't be more thankful for this moment of clarity which came from our Father in Heaven.

But sometimes, we're just going to tune out that direction and advice, we're going to break some rules no matter what. It's just our sinful, broken nature.

But having a father also means that when we mess up, we need forgiveness and we feel deficient without it.

Ernest Hemingway tells the story of the Spanish father who wanted to be reconciled with his son who ran away from home to the city of Madrid. The father misses the son and puts an advertisement in the local newspaper El Liberal. The advertisement read, "Paco, meet me at the Hotel Montana at noon on Tuesday. All is forgiven! Love, Papa."

Paco is such a common name in Spain that when the father went to the Hotel Montana the next day at noon there were 800 young men named Paco waiting for their fathers!

Hemingway's story reminds us how desperate all of us are for forgiveness.

The Bible tells us a similar story. It's the story of a young man, so dissolute in his desires that he begs his father to give him all that he will inherit. Amazingly, the father does this. Then, when the man's dissolute life dissolves into hunger and desperation, he wants to go home. And instead of offering this wayward son a job as a hired hand, the fatted calf is prepared, music played, a party held for the son's return home.

In only the way a Father can, God forgives us of our sin through Jesus Christ. According to Jeremiah 31, he chooses, in his divine omnipotence, to forget the sins of the past. It means that no matter what you've done, no matter which of the commandments you've broken most recently, that God's Fathering love has already forgiven you.

According to God's word, God has created you, called you good. We are, according to Psalm 139, fearfully and wonderfully made. God the Father has forgiven us through Jesus Christ and now is with us presently in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now I want to close this morning telling you about an experience I had at my last job. One of the younger families invited Natalie and I to go to their daughter's dance recital. We happily agreed but didn't know that this dance recital was an end-of-year extravaganza for tons of dance troops. As we sat there and

watched team after team do their numbers, I developed quite an eye for talent and on that day, there were tons of talented young men and women.

But then, this one troupe came to the stage. The music played and these girls and boys starting spinning around and doing their routines and it was pretty quick that I noticed that none of them were any good. But they had these amazing smiles on their faces. They certainly were not as polished as the other dancers, but their hearts sure were in it. As it would turn out, one of the little girl's father was sitting right next to me. I caught sight of him and his expression was priceless. There was a look of complete joy covering his face. In fact, overcome by joy, tears were streaming down his face. Here was his little girl, dancing her heart out, and, to him, it was perfect. It didn't matter to him that his daughter was not what we'd call a traditionally good dancer, what mattered was that he was getting to see her shine.

At first, I didn't understand it. I really didn't. Several months later, Natalie gave birth to Benjamin and I began to understand just a little about being a Father. I realized that this man was just doing what was natural. He was watching his child with the eyes of a father.

Dance like no one is watching.

No thanks.

My suggestion to you and to me is this – Dance like your heavenly father is watching, and know that he's filled with delight seeing you spin and twirl in this dance called life. He's joyful, because, no matter what, he's watching you with the eyes of a Father!

## Outline for 'God the Father'

### Introduction

- Apostle's Creed
  - o God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

### God is Almighty

- St. Anselm of Canterbury, 11<sup>th</sup> century Christian thinker
  - o Ontological proof of God, focused our attention on God's almighty nature telling us that "God was that of which nothing greater could be imagined."
    - Godzilla, defeated by Mothra
  - o On and on we go until we get to this idea of almightiness. Powerful over not only just things but time and space and all things in between.
- Psalm 97:1-5
  - o The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice;  
let the many coastlands be glad!  
Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;  
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.  
Fire goes before him  
and burns up his adversaries all around.  
His lightnings light up the world;  
the earth sees and trembles.  
The mountains melt like wax before the Lord,  
before the Lord of all the earth.
- Jurgen Moltmann – "*Omnipotence can be feared, but never loved.*"

Bridge – But God isn't JUST ALMIGHTY.

### God is Father

- Ford advertisement illustration. Both Almighty and Father.
- God isn't just MALE
- This marker Father is meant to point us to His parenting aims and ability
  - o But a lot of us don't want a parent, we want a best friend who green lights everything we desire.
- Dance like nobody is watching, PhD William Purkey
  - o On one hand, this is perhaps positive
    - But, on the other hand, it leads to an awful lot of self-focus
      - We see this amplified in social media.
        - o Story about Amy
- Left alone, we are selfish, self-seeking, self-aggrandizing but also dreadfully frightened of what lies ahead.
  - o Without a parent, without a Father, we are all alone in the universe just waiting for the other shoe to drop.
    - We're just out here, using social media to present ourselves as we hope to be with little regard to who we actually are.
    - That leaves us with scant hope when the markers are down and we're in real fear, real jeopardy, feeling really ALONE.
- But we're not alone, we have an Almighty Father.
  - o I learned something years ago – SHIP, call until you get someone who is both knowledgeable and desirous to help.
  - o God hits both in that he is both able in his omnipotence and willing to help in his Fatherly role.

## Human Fathers are Imperfect

- Chef Boy Ardee
- Sending Natalie and the Kids to a birthday party in Gastonia which was actually happening in Huntersville.

## Traits of the Father

- Providing
  - Creation
    - Everything from the subatomic to the furthest galaxies away from us.
  - Old Testament provision
    - Manna from heaven, water from a rock, a son raised from the dead so a widow would be provided for.
  - Isaiah 40
    - The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.
- Protecting
  - Dad and the School Gym teachers
    - Went Papa bear. I've done that, too
  - The Book of Daniel – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.
  - Den of Lions
  - God protects us
- Forgiving
  - Dad and Pitfall
  - Ernest Hemmingway Paco story
    - Wanted to be a bullfighter, Father knew better, Paco runs away
    - *“Paco, meet me at the Hotel Montana at noon on Tuesday. All is forgiven! Love, Papa.”*
      - Paco is such a common name in Spain that when the father went to the Hotel Montana the next day at noon there were 800 young men named Paco waiting for their fathers...and waiting for the forgiveness they never thought was possible!
  - Prodigal Son

## Conclusion

- Dance recital
- Dance like nobody's looking?
  - No thanks, dance like your Father in heaven is watching you with great joy and anticipation.