

Sermon preached by Rev Chris Moroney at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral,
Sydney on Wednesday 29th August 2007. Reading: Ephesians 6:1-4
Topic: "Fathers"

I wonder how you feel about Father's Day? Is this a good time or a sad time for you? So much will depend on our experience of family life.

1 GOD'S IDEAL FOR SOCIETY

- Families

We are made in the image of God. We are meant to have dominion over the other animals, and to care for them and to care for and nurture this world that God has made. God is that he has made us to live in relationship with one another. We are not all the same, but we can relate to one another. God made us to live and to be nurtured, cared for and assisted in our development in families. "It is not good for a man to be alone" God said and he made a helper fit for him. Adam and Eve are described for us as the complimentary couple, different, equal and meant for each other. And as a God-given result of their union, they had children. They were to be nurtured in secure and loving care, by both parents contributing their distinctive parts to the whole process.

- Brokenness

The ideal family soon became a family with relationship issues. Sin entered the world when Adam and Eve defied God and his word and ate from the fruit of the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They ended up trying to hide from God. Then they blamed each other for disobeying God. Soon after that Cain killed his brother Abel.

And families have been breaking up ever since. It is hard for us to get on well with each other. None of us are perfect. Relationships break down all the time. Sin infects every one of us. Our modern world that has left God behind knows more brokenness and isolation than ever. As we live increasingly private and separate lives it is harder and harder to find stable families and faithful fathers. How can we look to God for healing?

2 CHILDREN AND PARENTS

- Positives

When we think about our own family experience, I hope that can remember back to the things that our parents taught us. They would have given us direction in life. In what they said and did they set an example for us.

Our parents taught us how to speak and walk and live, even at times survive. They showed us how to stick at things, when they told us to keep going at school, or to eat our vegetables, or to give back the money that we took. It is right, under God for parents to give instructions, that are good and godly and for us to have learnt those things as children.

Again, by the grace of God, those of us who have been parents have honoured God as we have given careful and thought out directions to the children committed to our care.

All these things are real positives for which we can praise God and give him thanks. Positive thankfulness honours God and promotes our healing.

- Negatives

The negatives come when we can look at these words and feel a conflict with our experience. We may have been defiant and unco-operative. Our personal story might have been rebellious, through the company we kept, or some rogue spirit that just seemed to take over. Some people go through life, just doing the opposite of what their parents and other "authority figures" tell them to do. You may have some regrets now as you look back.

On the other hand, your experience may have been that your parents were not always there for you. Your parents may have been troubled themselves and given you a hard time, not setting the right direction and instruction for you. Some children have been abused by their own parents, others have been neglected. Sometimes we can feel abandoned when the parents break up.

Many of us have lots of issues to work through and to pray about for God's work of healing in our lives. God can enable us to forgive and to move forward in our inner healing.

- Honour

Here Paul is taking up the Old Testament commandments. IN the book of Exodus, the Israelites had been brought out of Egypt and into the desert where they were told how to live as God's people. Fundamental to godly living is order and respect for roles in society. To honour one's parents is very important. They are the ones who have given us life. They are the ones who have nurtured and taught us. Even if we have been adopted it is still good for us to follow this injunction and do all that we can to show respect and love for them and all that they have done for us. We need to remember that no-one is perfect, and it may be a struggle, but we are encouraged to keep doing it.

- Promise

This is indeed the only commandment with a promise "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land" What a great encouragement that is. God's blessing comes to God's people when they follow God's pattern for their lives.

What a tragedy it is when people through their own hurt or just their own selfishness neglect their parents.

What a joy it is when children of every age are able to honour and respect their parents.

What blessings follow in terms of the good of society and the warmth of friendships and love that is generated.

3 FATHERS AND CHILDREN

Specifically, then Paul goes on to talk about fathers in verse 4

- Negative

He focuses on a word of caution. Why? I think it is because there is a tendency for men to try to rush things. We tend to be task centred, getting on with the job. The mission becomes more important than the people involved.

Fathers can be overcritical and the can ignore their children. There needs to be a good balance of correction and interest and support.

Paul wrote these words in the first century, when fathers ruled their children with an iron will.

This would have been quite radical then. Nowadays the tendency is probably the other way.

There are lots of books and ideas about children finding their direction in life, and not being guided and nurtured by their parents, and rarely by the encouragement of their dad specifically.

But a father's love and attention is very important in anyone development.

- Positive

There is a positive challenge for all Christian fathers here. We are to bring up our children, our boys and our girls in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

That means correcting their wrong behaviour with suitable punishments, not hitting the children hard, but withdrawing privileges and allowing the consequences of their actions impact on them. It means giving clear and helpful guidelines, talking through issues, reading the bible and discussing the stories of the bible and the temptations of life.

Boys and girls really value all the attention and affection that their dad can give them. Mums seem to do it more naturally, dads need to be reminded and prompted.

- Thankfulness

Again, as we each reflect on our own experiences of life, if our dad was like that, if he modeled and taught us the Christian faith, and showed us love, we have much for which to give God thanks and praise, on this Father's day especially

- Disappointment

But for many of us here tonight, these things may not have been what we went through in our younger formative years. We might feel disappointed, even resentful. There may be some issues that have yet to be resolved.

- Forgiveness

One of the key elements to our healing under God, is to turn to God and seek his strength to forgive those who have harmed us in any way.

He forgives us through our Lord Jesus.

He helps us to forgive others, even gradually, and opens us up to his healing power

4 OUR FATHER

- Not for everyone

It is not true to say that we believe in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of all mankind. The God of the Bible is only the Father of those who put their trust and hope in the Lord Jesus.

- Available

Jesus taught his disciples to Pray "Our Father" in Matthew 6.

In John 14 :6 Jesus is the only one way to the Father.

- Faithful

Others will always let us down from time to time. Our Heavenly Father is always there for us. His steadfast loves endures forever.

- Personal

Each one of us has to make a personal response of repentance and trust. We call upon him to heal the wounds of the past and give us wisdom to deal with the wounds of the present. We believe that our Heavenly Father is powerful and interested in every part of our lives and He is able to bringing healing.