

06.16.24 ~ Pentecost 4 & Father's Day

"A Father's Gifted Influence"

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Proverbs 17:6; 22:6; 23:24 (NIV)

17⁶ Children's children are a crown to the aged,
and parents are the pride of their children.

22⁶ Start children off on the way they should go,
and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

23²⁴ The father of a righteous child has great joy;
a man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him.

Leader: These Are Wisdom's Words of Instruction.

All: Thanks be to God!

Luke 6:43-45 (NLT)

The Tree and Its Fruit

⁴³ "A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. ⁴⁴ A tree is identified by its fruit. Figs are never gathered from thornbushes, and grapes are not picked from bramble bushes. ⁴⁵ A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-14, 15-16 (NLT)

¹ Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. ² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. ³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. ⁴ For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.

⁵ There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

⁶ one God and Father of all,

who is over all, in all, and living through all.

⁷ However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ.

¹¹ Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.

¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Leader: These Are God's Instructive Words through Jesus and Paul!

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Creator God, we thank you for creating humankind and especially fathers, grandfathers, stepfathers, uncles, and father figures. We appreciate their willingness and capabilities to lead families, organizations, and institutions. We ask a blessing on their lives and leadership; keep them healthy, humble, and kind. Give them a sense of urgency to share wisdom and faith with others who need this type of leadership and testimony. Thank you for all the celebrations today and may they be worthy of the responsibilities you bestow on father figures. May the Holy Spirit be felt by all today as is your voice heard today through this messenger. Amen.

Happy Father's Day! The first American Father's Day was celebrated because of a Spokane, Washington woman named Sonora Smart Dodd; she was the daughter of a widower who raised six children, who wanted to honor her father and all male parents with a similar holiday to Mother's Day. After much lobbying and retail cooperation, Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Calvin Coolidge established the third Sunday as Father's Day each year. And did you know that although there aren't any specific passages in the Bible that affirm this day, Catholic Europe has had this holiday in March? It goes back to 1508, and in the Coptic Orthodox Church, fatherhood is celebrated in July and goes back further to the 5th Century! So, fatherhood of all kinds is valued by the church, too.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, or what we call the Old Testament, cohesion of the family unit is a major feature and fathers figure prominently in its stories, not always bringing the best results, but in the

wisdom literature, there is much to be learned. In our first wisdom passage, Proverbs 17:6, if you're a Senior Adult dad, a crown refers to your grandchildren or great grands. They become a source of your joy and pride. They are the reason for a positive sense of pride in this case, as are your children, nephews, nieces, and other children you have mentored. On the other hand, you parental figures may be a source of pride to them as well! For most, they, too, are proud of the roles you have played in their lives as adult advisors, even if they hated taking advice when they were younger. As we age, and especially on these special days, we think fondly of our father figures and celebrate their wisdom and love in hindsight. Do you have a favorite story or memory you can recount this Father's Day, either as a son or daughter or as a parent? Think about it and share it later with us or your loved ones.

And remember that our human relationships must be under and influenced by our relationship with God, the Father of all. Proverbs 22:6 is the most familiar to us. Here it is in the King James Version: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The Hebrew word for train is "*hanak*," which means dedicate or dedicating as in a house, temple, or image. This is where "*Hanukkah*" comes from—the holiday to dedicate the altar to God's eight days of miraculous provision. *Hanak* can also mean to dedicate a person to divine service or a setting aside, a narrowing of conduct or direction. Today, we would say setting boundaries, or helping children choose which paths to follow, either morally, vocationally, or professionally. If the parents or mentors are good examples, the children or mentees will follow them (most of the time, anyway). And this reassures us that if they stray from

that right path, they will turn back to God eventually (*teshuva* in Hebrew; *metanoia* in the Greek, to turn around). Sometimes it takes an outsider and not the parent to facilitate a return, but God will orchestrate that if you continue to pray for it.

In Proverbs 23, verses 19-23 speak also to those paths of choice or discernment and how children come to respect that wisdom only later in life. The word “wise” in verse 24 perhaps from God’s point of view means righteousness and Godly living, discipline, and obedience. These skills young people need to develop not only help the child or mentee, but also fulfill the parents or father figures as they reflect on their influence. Please know that we cannot control any outcomes, but we can celebrate and duplicate the truth and wisdom of the father figures we have known. We pray that they know or have known the importance of that influence in our own lives. So today, we honor those still “in it, fathering every day,” those who **you** fathered or influenced in your past, and for many of us, those who fathered and influenced us. We say thank you.

Let us turn to the Greek Scriptures, or the New Testament as we say. In our Luke 6:43-45 passage, we see the fig tree again as an illustration. People know the kind of tree it is by its fruit, so if a person bears righteous “fruit” (in our case, progeny) the tree or person himself is righteous by what’s said, not always by what’s done; out of the overflow of his heart, his mouth speaks. This reminds a man (or a woman for that matter) that one cannot hide one’s character, either good or bad. In Biblical times, the heart symbolized the active intellect rather than the emotion. The good man (i.e., father or father figure) produces treasure if his heart is pure; that can mean children, mentees, or wise leadership to

share with others. That is a desirable goal, so men, guard your hearts so that they are filled only with love, truth, mercy, and honor. Out of evil hearts comes evil thoughts and deeds. We see this so much in today's headlines; that's why we need the church's influence to purify the hearts of this generation of fathers and father figures.

In the Ephesians passages, Paul is speaking to and about the church, a fitting direction on Father's Day based on our world's need for good. Live lives fitting for the calling God gave you; he called you to lead. With or without children, your role is pre-ordained to be virtuous, humble, gentle (not weak), patient, kind, and persevering. All these traits bring about unity and harmony in relationships, the home, community, and church. Peace and love will reign with these qualities; one body, one spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. God is the divine father of all believers as he unites us in grace.

Some of you in past sermons have learned about spiritual gifts and the five-fold ministry. I propose we think of those today, APEST (Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds, and Teachers) in light of fatherly and leadership roles in the home, community, and the church. You cannot be all things or serve in all those roles at the same time. In the early days of a family or a church, leaders must be apostles, trying new things, then teachers and shepherds of their children or church members. They may also be evangelists in their occupations or church roles as they grow the church, but then look toward legacy to become prophetic visionaries, and again pastoral as they care for spouses or aging congregants. Ultimately, no matter which is your gifted influence, you must speak truth and wisdom in love for the unity and harmony of the

whole, and that means sacrificing many things along the way. That is the profile of a mature believing Christian father figure, one that is not tossed by the fads and winds of today's excitement or most current technology app, but builds on the lessons of yesterday, pays close attention to the present, and plans diligently for the future. And the metric or plumbline for fathers and father figures? It is Christ the Lord; model your own lives with the teachings of Jesus. Amen? Amen! ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you today for these reminders. Help us to remember the lessons we've learned from Godly men in our past. Help us to forgive those who hurt us in some way. For this special day, may we give thanks to you for creating us in your image, and we thank you for sending your son for our benefit. We ask you to strengthen us today and every day to be the kind of leaders, fathers, teachers, pastors, and more that you have called us to be. Thank you, Jesus, for it is in your name we pray, **Amen.**