

06.21.26 ~ Pentecost 4
“Righteous Leadership”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Comfort

Psalm 103:8-18 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 522

- ⁸ The Lord is compassionate and merciful,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
- ⁹ He will not constantly accuse us,
nor remain angry forever.
- ¹⁰ He does not punish us for all our sins;
he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.
- ¹¹ For his unfailing love toward those who fear him
is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.
- ¹² He has removed our sins as far from us
as the east is from the west.
- ¹³ **The Lord is like a father to his children,**
tender and compassionate to those who fear him.
- ¹⁴ For he knows how weak we are;
he remembers we are only dust.
- ¹⁵ Our days on earth are like grass;
like wildflowers, we bloom and die.
- ¹⁶ The wind blows, and we are gone—
as though we had never been here.
- ¹⁷ But the love of the Lord remains forever
with those who fear him.
- His salvation extends to the children’s children
- ¹⁸ of those who are faithful to his covenant,
of those who obey his commandments!

Leader: These Are Words of Fatherhood.

People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Instruction

Romans 3:20-26, 28-30 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 979

- ²⁰ For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands.
The law simply shows us how sinful we are.
Christ Took Our Punishment
- ²¹ But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. ²² We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.
- ²³ For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. ²⁴ Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. ²⁵ For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his

life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, ²⁶ for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

²⁸ So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.

²⁹ After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is. ³⁰ There is only one God, and he makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.

Leader: These Are Apostle Paul's Words.

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Father God, we worship you today pondering our own fathers, our role as fathers, or those fathers who are with you now. We learn our early faith by watching how you live according to Christ's teachings or not. Help us to be forthright, fearless, and faithful like Christ's example. Teach us Paul's words and the proper interpretation from this new lens of grafting. We are grafted into the family of God and Christ by our baptism and Christ's salvation. Help us to understand that better. Let us appreciate all those who fathered us to maturity in various ways. We love you, Lord, and long to be in your presence. Help us to open our minds and hearts to hear an encouraging message of leadership on this day. Please speak through these Scriptures, this message, and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Again, I say, ***"Happy Father's Day!"*** If you answer to that moniker, Dad, Daddy, Father, Pop, Grandad or some version of those, congratulations! It is your special day. Even if you are not a dad so to speak, you must have one, living or dead, biological or symbolic; or you may be a father figure to someone, so men of the church, I hope you will enjoy or celebrate with someone this day. The first American Father's Day was celebrated because of a Spokane, Washington woman named Sonora Smart Dodd, 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. Did you know that although there aren't any specific passages in the Bible that affirm this day, Catholic Europe celebrates this holiday in March; and going back to 1508, in the Coptic Orthodox Church, fatherhood is celebrated in July and goes back further even to the 5th Century! So, fatherhood of all kinds is valued by the church.

In the wisdom literature we spoke of last week (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs) and in the Hebrew Scriptures, or what we call the Old Testament, fathers or father figures are mentioned too often to count and cohesion of the family unit figure prominently in stories. Our psalm today recalls God's unfailing love as our heavenly father, which for most of us supersedes any of our relational challenges; it also focuses on God as the father of Israel, his graciousness and mercy to his children, and how he constantly rescues or forgives them of their sins. In early translations, verse 13 says "Like a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Our New Living Translation says, "13 The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him." In these days of discord, family disruptions, polarizing opinions, and sometimes violence, I prefer the NLT reminder that the Lord is compassionate and forgiving. That implies redemption and second chances, whereas pity feels like judgment. The writer's roots in God and faith are deep and wide, yet continues to the next generation of children's children, the branches yet to grow.

Friday was another holiday in some circles and at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly in Jacksonville, we explored and celebrated the significance of Juneteenth. Although it may not be a

milestone in your personal history, it is an important recognition. Let me remind you of its significance. In 1865, in Galveston, Texas, residents began to mark the day when members of the Union Army arrived there to both inform enslaved people that they were now entitled to a wage for their labor, and to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 among slaveholders. Freedom celebrations for this holiday continued among black and brown families with hometown picnics, but in June of 2021, President Biden signed into law a protected federal holiday to commemorate this freedom as unconditional. And there is much work to be done to protect these freedoms.

The last two weeks we focused on how the Gentiles or Greeks were brought into the family of Jewish Christ followers through grafting, both the natural and spiritual forms of combining two trees or plants to produce the best of both. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans explained how the Gentile believers were grafted to the roots of the Jewish faith. He also spent the first two and a half (2 ½) chapters of Romans confessing how ALL had sinned and were guilty of transgression against God. The verses he used from the Old Testament held the entire world accountable to God. Paul shows that obedience to the Mosaic Law was not to redeem individuals or countries from sin but was simply their conscience and condemnation. He sets up a better argument to receive Jesus' teachings, death, resurrection, and ascension to be our second chance for eternal life, despite sin.

The hope of this book of Romans lies in Paul's wrestling with his own testimony of guilt and release of shame because of his Damascus Road experience of meeting Jesus--face to face! Yes, Jesus convicted

Paul's heart that he had sinned and fallen short, but he also reminded Paul, a devout Jew, that he was forgiven at the cross. These verses in Romans 3:20-26 challenge others to see faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord is more important than following the 613 Levitical laws to the letter. Faith in Jesus yields a grace and mercy to produce a spiritual freedom more important than even physical freedom. Faithfulness promotes right relationship. The righteousness of God includes his faithfulness; we become righteous as our faith grows and matures in God through Christ.

Now, yes, we must obey our fathers' and mothers' instructions for they lead and instruct our lives as children. As adults, however, we have choices to live in sin with only God's judgment and wrath, or to live in peaceful repentance with God's love and forgiveness fueling your Kingdom work on earth. That choice of faith over sin is not a judgment scenario to fear in life but rather becomes a type of "Righteous Leadership" that is personal, familial, corporate, and existential. Jesus becomes our only leader and instructor. God's love and protection through our grafting into his people (i.e., Abraham and the Jews) overwhelms the shame of guilt and sin. We are forgiven. And we have responsibility to share our salvation with others. This is hope, people! You are not your worst selves! Jesus sees us through loving eyes and calls us to himself to be held, loved, encouraged, and build right (or righteous) relationships with him. Then you can demonstrate the righteous leadership of fatherhood, pastoring, shepherding, or teaching. We are justified through this faith, so how is your faith this Sunday? Any day?

I will try to weave more of the CBF conference into my sermons in the future; there was much to digest, so today wasn't the summary I had

originally planned, but there are elements of what I heard and learned even in today's message. Let me say "The Bold Type" General Assembly was renewing and energizing! We are bolder than we think we are, so shore up your faithfulness! Christ will reward that with courage, strength, and Kingdom growth. Amen. ||

Please pray with me: We love and thank you Jesus as we read your word today. Our faith in you is steadfast, even if we waiver in doubt or exhaustion. We trust that you will empower us to continue your work here on earth to grow the Kingdom of God. We trust that you forgive our sin and poor decision-making. We are glad you were present in our fellowship today and accept our gratitude for grafting your people to produce the best fruit. May we be that fruit or at least be the branches that hold new fruit! Deepen our faith and strengthen our resolve to follow your teachings, inviting others to love you as we do. Please bless the fathers, grands, greats, and father-figures among us to live according to your will, preserving our freedoms of religious liberty. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.