

"Mothers and a Father"

John 17:6, 10-19

In our Scripture today, we are given an opportunity to listen in on a 'conversation' that the very first disciples were privy to: between God and God's Son. One between a child and a parent. (Tho it was a rather one-sided one. Like some kids we know, the child did all the talking...) It might lead us to wonder just what that 'silent partner/parent,' our God in heaven, is like. As the Scriptures tell us, we are 'made in the image of God.' Just what IS that 'image?' Would anyone like to tell us just **'what does God look like?'** (I didn't think so...)

Well, as those same Scriptures tell us that we are to have the faith of a child... to look through those types of innocent, trusting eyes... here's a few insights from children ages 7-10 as to the nature of God:

"God is like a **Transformer**...He can turn himself into anything he wants." (Shane)

"God **doesn't sleep** because he watches over us all the time." (Kelly)

"God has **giant ears** so he can hear everything we are saying." (Gabby)

"God **knows everything** about everyone... he has files on everyone that include families and pets. Also has a big screen to watch the good deeds." (Olivia)

"God's got an invisible head and he floats in the garden. One side is night and the other side is day and God sees the owls and bunnies and butterflies. God also rides a motorcycle but he's playing hockey in Pasadena right now. He can do everything." (Kamran)

So just WHERE do these 'visions' of God come from? Sometimes, from those 'fertile imaginations' that kids can have, picturing a 'motorcycle-riding' God playing 'hockey' in 'Pasadena.' Some from everyday experiences, like 'big screens,' personnel 'files,' and 'Transformers.' Some from Bible stories that speak of an 'invisible God,' one who comes to his own in a 'garden,' never 'sleeping' but always 'watching'... always 'listening.'

But here's a sobering thought: Where children get some of their earliest, and most lasting images of the nature of God, their heavenly 'parent,' is from their earthly ones... their mother and father. Those who gave their son/daughter life, nurturing and caring for them...

those all-powerful, all-knowing ones who might seem to never sleep, but always be watching and listening. Indeed, as we heard in today's passage, and throughout the Gospels, Jesus... the **Son** of God... often speaks of and to His **Father** in heaven. Throughout the ages children have heard adults pray to 'God the *Father*.' It should come as no surprise that when children are asked, "What does God look like?" their responses usually include: "He is very old, has a long white beard, bushy white hair, and wears a flowing white dress or robe." Those young children who carry those same images of God into adulthood...

For many of us... myself included... the image of God as Father is NO problem. I was blessed to have an earthly father who embodied many of the same positive traits of a Heavenly Father. But I am often reminded... and recently so... of how detrimental it can be for those who have had very negative role models in their earthly fathers to associate an 'Almighty God' with an 'all-miserable' dad. There are many 'adult children' (hmmm, I'm definitely one of those... an 'adult child') that would say that if this 'heavenly Father' is anything like my earthly one, then I want NOTHING to do with Him!

And in light of what today is, looking at it from a purely secular standpoint, one could gather that there are whole lot more 'dysfunctional dads' out there than Moms. According to the National Retail Federation, it is estimated that 86% of Americans will celebrate Mothers' Day this year, spending some **\$23.1 Billion**... Which is over half again as much as is estimated to be spent on Fathers' Day. The term 'deadbeat dads' unfortunately has become a regular part of our vocabulary. I can't really think of one for mothers... perhaps 'miscreant moms?'

There is certainly truth to the concern that there has been much misuse and abuse in ascribing to men the same type of authority and power ascribed to our 'Father God.' BUT, we should NOT confuse the ways that mankind has maligned that title of 'father' with the purity and holiness of our Divine 'Father.' And that, in truth, there are many quality traits of the Triune God... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... that are quite 'motherly' in nature.

Indeed, as I first read today's passage from John, with the occasion of Mothers' Day on my mind, I not only heard Jesus speaking to His Father. I also could hear the voice of mothers speaking to their God. Spoken, and unspoken, prayers of how they have cared for those human treasures given them by the 'Giver of all good things.' And that as we are mindful of how our

earthly mothers have borne witness to the Divine love made flesh in Jesus Christ, it should remind us of how each one of us, 'children of God' that we are, are created to express our love to the human treasures given to US by God.

Let us be thankful for those earthly mothers who could proudly proclaim the same words Jesus said in that first verse: ***"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world."*** (John 17:6) Or, in the NIV, ***"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me..."***

It is on a day like this that we express our gratitude, either directly or indirectly, for the ways that our mothers have revealed the nature of God to us. How they helped us to **KNOW the ways of the LORD**. They may not have mentioned God by name. They didn't always do it perfectly. (And as a parent, the verse 'Let the one who is without fault cast the first stone' sure rings true!) But there was most often, in their **words** and **deeds**, an expression of how to live in a manner that one could be proud of. To live in a manner that our LORD could be proud of.

Jesus, of course, was the ONLY 'perfect' revelation of God. Because He IS God! It is His perfect pattern for living that we should focus on... not on the imperfect ways of humanity. Let us be grateful for those positive ways that our families have helped us to **Know the Lord**. And **discard the rest!** Focusing on the positive legacies left to us by our human families, we must in turn be concerned with how we can leave an even MORE positive legacy on those who come after us. Just as children are left to carry on the good name of their family, so too did Jesus leave this world in the hands of his disciples (US!) to carry on the 'holy family' name. SO... **How does YOUR life 'reveal' the name of Jesus to those whom you've been given?**

For our lives to 'reveal' that we, in truth, 'know the lord'... in order that others may in turn come to know Him... we must, quite simply, **Show the Love**. As we were growing up, how would any of us be SHOWN that our parents LOVED us? In their living out the words of Jesus about his 'beloved ones': ***"While I was with them, I protected them... I guarded them."*** (John 17:12) That no matter what happened to us 'out in the world,' we could come to a place of safety. A home where we felt 'protected'...'guarded'...a place where we are 'shown love.'

In saying those words, however, we ALL know that there are far too many 'children of God' (both young and old) who are NOT 'shown the love.' Too many heart-breaking stories of

those who did NOT feel 'protected'... 'guarded'... 'safe.' Perhaps even some 'in this very room.' It is for those who live in fear, in isolation ... be they across town or across the world... that we must follow Christ's lead in interceding for them: ***"I ask you to protect them from the evil one. Holy Father, protect them... so that they may be one, as we are one."*** (John 17:15)

Now, I know that in the context of this passage, Jesus was speaking particular 'protection' for the body of believers called in His Name. For there is NO doubt that all who truly labor for the Lord Jesus will be under attack from the evil one. Given the division that can be present in individual fellowships to entire denominations, we certainly need to pray that we ***"may be one,"*** as the Godhead is one. But let us be mindful of how our 'faith in action'... in word and deed, in service and in prayer... serves as a living witness to ALL of our oneness in Christ. As we serve at Oak Park and Fairview///Golden Age or War Vets Home... as we support relief efforts from Greenwich Terrace to Vera Dero Cuba///through the Food Bank or Pentecost Offering... as we purchase snacks for waiting rooms or jewelry from Mission Mart///as we speak a word of encouragement to a close friend, or to a perfect stranger... we **'Show the Love'** of Christ. A love that will never leave them, nor forsake them... a love which will guard and protect them...

Today we have celebrated all that is good and praiseworthy about the 'institution' of Motherhood. But we have also been reminded that whenever we celebrate a secular holiday... like Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, Valentine's Day... it can be 'bittersweet.' For in being the flawed, broken souls that we are, so too can our relationships be flawed and broken... relationships broken by anger, selfishness, or pride. Or, relationships broken by physical distance, or death. Unlike the 'Holy Father' of Jesus, it is much more difficult for us to live up to the promise, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' Our human flesh too often disrupts the work of the Holy Spirit...

It was against this backdrop of the brokenness of humanity... the pain AND blessing of both mothers and fathers... that I raised a question with two very different individuals this week. Different genders. Different family backgrounds. Different levels of theological perspective. I asked that, given this week's title of "Mothers and a Father"... and of the references that Jesus makes (all around and in this passage) to his "Father"... how did they feel

about the use of that male term for someone as 'unknowable' as God? And their answers were *remarkably* similar. They basically both said that God is a holy mystery. And for those 1st Century minds, Jesus would have to speak in terms that they could understand. That while no human can really comprehend who God IS, we can somewhat understand what God is LIKE.

The closest we can ever get to 'knowing' what God is like is to know God's Son. In Paul's words, ***"Christ is the visible image of the invisible God... For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ."*** (Colossians 1:15, 19) To know Christ is to know God. For, in the words of Hebrews, ***"The son reflects God's own glory, and everything about him represents God exactly."*** (Heb. 1:3)

As much as a mother might spend time in a 'garden'... seems to 'never sleep'... is 'always watching' and carefully 'listening'... those are traits reserved for the one true God. The God whose 'fullness' was pleased to live in Christ. As you and I seek to also 'live in Christ,' may we too 'reflect God's own glory'... as we too seek to 'represent God exactly' through the life and Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. In all of our IM-perfections, let us follow the perfect Son of the perfect Parent...