

Sundau - June 21, 2009
Pastor - Rev. Paula P. Werner
Sermon - **Being An All Pro Dad**

Let me remind you of the context so our Bible reading from the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel will make sense for us today.

For a very long time there were judges who ruled Israel. The surrounding nations had kings so the Israelites believed that they too should have a king. The priests tried to convince them that this was not the best way and that God was their king. The people wanted a king. Be careful what you wish for. God tasked the priest Samuel to anoint a king. That first king was Saul. In the beginning he was a good king, but Saul had his problems and at one point did not follow God's commands. The priest Samuel who had anointed Saul was estranged from him and it grieved him.

Listen now for the word of God for you today..... as I read 1 Sam 15:35b -16:13a

We know very little about Jesse, the father in our story. For some of us, that is also true about our own fathers. We know very little about them. We do know that Jesse was from Bethlehem and that he was from a strong, prominent lineage, being a descendant of Boaz and Ruth. We know that his wealth consisted chiefly of sheep. He, himself was rather unknown and of modest position in life. The common man, the man of modest means and accomplishments --- that would likely define many of our own fathers as well.

We do know that when the priest Samuel came to Jesse's town and gathered the elders, Jesse was among them. Jesse went with the elders in the faith to be sanctified and to make a sacrifice. That tells us that Jesse was a man of faith. We who had fathers of faith were fortunate as were Jesse's sons.

Jesse did not go alone to meet with the priest Samuel and the elders of his village. He took his 7 sons with him. Father and sons were worshipping together. Blessed, fortunate are we who worshipped WITH our fathers. Most fortunate and blessed are children today who worship WITH their fathers.

Samuel the priest had been tasked by God to anoint the next king. Samuel figures that the king is to come from Jesse's sons. Seven sons come before Samuel, but God says they are not to be anointed. When Samuel asks if these are all Jesse's sons, Jesse acknowledges that the youngest son is out keeping the family's sheep while Jesse and sons are worshipping. When this youngest son was brought in, Samuel was told by God that this was the one. And so David -- the shepherd boy -- was anointed king..... and we know that it was from the house and lineage of David that Jesus himself came.

This story -- although 3,000 years old, has a message for us, particularly for fathers today. Just as Jesse was a faithful father and practiced his religion, so too are men today called to be faithful to God as husbands, fathers, men.

When the Lord's priest, Samuel, inquired about Jesse's sons, Jesse obediently brought his sons to the priest to participate in the worship. Just as

Jesse was obedient to God's call, so too are men today summoned to be obedient to God's call.

There are many differences in life as a husband and father 3,000 years ago and today. We live in different cultures --- from 3,000 years ago. Theirs was an agrarian culture, dictated by the crops and the flocks, by movement of tribes and foreign rulers. Our life and culture is highly technological --- our culture is different even from the one we were raised in and certainly different from the one which shaped our own fathers.

Roles of men and women were far more strictly delineated 3,000 years ago. Roles of even our grandparents were stricter than they are today. Today men have a larger opportunity to participate in a wider variety of care-giving roles in the family and in careers than previously. Having a stay-at-home dad in previous generations was just unheard of. It is not today.

But whether the fathers that we are celebrating today are stay at home, or traditional 9-5 workers, whether they are in urban, suburban or rural areas, there are some definitive attributes that set apart men, husbands, fathers and not only endear them to us, but are formative of their families, and in turn of society. Where men conscientiously take on and execute their roles, their families and all of society is stronger for it. Where men are absent or derelict in carrying out their responsibilities, children suffer and our social fabric is weaker.

Fathers are important – vitally important—perhaps there aren't as many Hallmark cards bought for Father's Day as for Mother's day or as many phone calls made, but do NOT let the amount of American consumerism define the importance of a man's role in his family, in his church, his community, this nation.

Dads are essential to the health of a family. Certainly there are families led by single women, but it's harder and there's a gap in the learning and functioning of the family without dad in the picture. But dad MUST step up, into the picture, whether he is married to the mother of his children or not. On this Father's Day we need to encourage and celebrate the men who behave in an uncommon fashion. Uncommon, is the title of a book by Tony Dungy which calls on American men to step up and lead a life of significance as a husband, man, and father. Tony Dungy, for those unfamiliar with the name, is the Indianapolis Colts football coach who won Superbowl 16—the first African American coach to win the Superbowl. Coach Dungy obviously has talent himself and also knows how to motivate, use and orchestrate talent of others on the football field, yet Coach Dungy is even more insightful about what he regards as his primary responsibility – building men worthy of being role models for a nation of boys who look up to them.

Dungy's book is perceptive and reminds us of values and practices that should form our lives. I do recommend the book to you --- a good Father's Day gift. I'd like to lift a couple of points Dungy made for us today.

First, men, develop your core – who you are. Your character speaks volumes to your family. Writer Robert Fulghum said, “Don’t worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.” The lyrics of a Rodney Atkins country song called, “Watching you” illustrate this: he sings

Drivin’ through town just my boy and me With a Happy Meal in his booster seat Knowin’ that he couldn’t have the toy ‘til his nuggets were gone.

A green traffic light turned straight to red;

I hit my brakes and mumbled under my breath.

His fries went a flyin’, and his orange drink covered his lap. Well, then my four year old said a four letter word; It started with “S” and I was concerned So I said, “Son, now where’d you learn to talk like that?”

Chorus:

He said, "I’ve been watching you, dad ain’t that cool? I’m your buckaroo, I wanna be like you.

And eat all my food and grow as tall as you are.

We got cowboy boots and camo pants

Yeah, we’re just alike, hey, ain’t we dad?

I want to do everything you do.

So I’ve been watching you."

Oh my.... The singer continues with his story:

We got back home and I went to the barn

I bowed my head and I prayed real hard

Said, “Lord, please help me help my stupid self.” Just this side of bedtime later that night

Turnin’ on my son’s Scooby-Doo nightlight.

He crawled out of bed and he got down on his knees. He closed his little eyes, folded his little hands Spoke to God like he was talkin’ to a friend.

And I said, “Son, now where’d you learn to pray like that?”

Chorus: He said, "I’ve been watching you, dad ain’t that cool? I’m your buckaroo, I want to be like you. And eat all my food and grow as tall as you are. We like fixin’ things and holding momma’s hand Yeah, we’re just alike, hey, ain’t we dad? I want to do everything you do; so I’ve been watching you"

With tears in my eyes I wrapped him in a hug.

Said, “My little bear is growin’ up.”

And he said, “But when I’m big I’ll still know what to do.” “Cause I’ve been watching you.

YOUR children – and other folk’s children are watching YOU....

As you dads have figured out by now, the children, the youth, they don’t need an essay or a preachy lecture on character, honesty, integrity, humility, stewardship, courage --- they have one being enacted right in front of them. The

decisions you make and the way you make them especially in the tough, most challenging times ---- the kids see and lessons are learned.

I really liked what Coach Dungy said about integrity, so I'm going to quote about a paragraph of his book..... "Integrity is what you do when no one is watching; it's doing the right thing all the time, even when it may work to your disadvantage. Integrity is keeping your word. Integrity is that internal compass and rudder that directs you to where you know you should go when everything around you is pulling you in a different direction. Some people think reputation is the same thing as integrity, but they are different. Your reputation is the public perception of your integrity. Because it's other people's opinions of you, it may or may not be accurate. Others determine your reputation, but only YOU determine your integrity. Integrity is critical to everything we do because it is the foundation of trustworthiness in our own eyes, in the eyes of those around us, and in God's eyes."

Dads who have developed their core values and live them, who stay involved in their children's lives, are building an "insurance policy" around their children. Dads without core values and who are absentee fathers, set their children up for troubled futures:

- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes.
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes
- 85% of all youths sitting in prisons grew up in a fatherless home

We need Fathers in the home. We Need Fathers to Step Up. Coach Dungy feels this so strongly that he has formed an organization dedicated to strengthening the bonds between fathers and their children. It's called AllPro Dad. It's an on-line organization with helpful resources for fathers. I like that name All Pro Dad; it reminds us to aim for the best in our job of fathering just as we aim for the best in our careers. Nobody minimizes the hard task that fathers, grandfathers, uncles undertake -- the balancing act between work, commute and family throws us all off-kilter at times. When you throw in sports practices and games, other kids activities, scouts, yard work, fixing the car, household maintenance, dad's life is over-full. And sometime is missing in this list of life to be balanced. What's been left out? You might have noticed ... it's a faith life..... God and service to God and others. Dungy would say that that is first and primary responsibility--- that that is what forms us. Our scripture lesson this morning about Jesse and his 8 sons taught us that nothing came before Jesse's obedience and faithfulness to God. When the priest Samuel called for a worship meeting, Jesse and sons were there. When the priest Samuel asked for Jesse's sons to step forward, Jesse readily produced them. When David was asked for --- there was no hesitation, he was brought immediately to the priest. Jesse was a faithful, obedient, God-fearing and serving man. Not a bad role model for Father's Day. It is my hope that you fathering men have made a commitment in your heart that mirrors the words from long ago by

another forceful, faithful man – Joshua. .”as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” May that be your motto as well this Father’s Day.