

Third Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/A): Father's Day Weekend
Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8
June 17-18, 2023
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

It's only natural to think about our Dads on Father's Day weekend. Because of a favorite verse in today's lesson from Romans, I'm actually thinking of a time I disappointed my Dad. The verse is:

God proves his loved for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)

I was in college, literally headed out the door to go back to school after Christmas break, and with great trepidation I 'fessed up to my Dad that my electric typewriter had been stolen from the dorm study room where I had left it. I was wrong on a couple counts.

- I'd been naïve to think it wouldn't be stolen; after all, I'd left it sitting in a public use area!
- I'd been cowardly to wait till I had one foot out the door to tell Dad. It was also **dumb**: the truth-that- had-to-be-told had weighed on me the whole vacation. As Pastor JJ would say, if you know you have to eat a frog, do it the first thing in the morning and get it over with!

The real reason I still remember the whole thing is that I knew I had disappointed Dad. Not just because if I'd told him as soon as it happened he could have filed for some insurance money because it was included on his homeowner's policy, I guess. He was also disappointed that I didn't tell him sooner because I was afraid to. I was afraid of his anger. He was perplexed by that. He was hurt that my memory of his anger caused me to be less than promptly honest with him. He didn't understand why. He couldn't have known how sensitive I was to his anger, and how afraid I was of losing his love, when I'd already lost my mom.

Being a Dad is so hard! Children need warm fuzzies, but they also need tough love. For 5 years my Dad was a single parent. Both my grandmothers and both my aunts were very appreciative of him and loved him a lot, but as a single parent of 3 daughters, I'm sure he was aware they were watching closely from the sidelines, to see what support they could offer, but also weighing how he was doing without my Mom in the picture.

Loss is part of life, so I'm sure many of you can identify when I say that my Dad was a case study in what Paul says in the letter to the Romans, namely that "suffering produces endurance" (Romans 5:3). Dad took it all stoically, but over the years he buried his young wife, his young daughter, and his young son-in-law. Sometimes suffering produces bitterness and desperation, but not when we fall back on faith. Dad fell back on faith, and his suffering produced endurance that produced character that produced hope that did not disappoint, the hope grounded in the gift of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Our parents' faith practices are so important in shaping the way we meet, cope, surmount, the seasons of suffering in our lives. I can say of my Dad:

- He knelt to pray next to his bed every night (until his hips were replaced, and then I'm sure he still prayed, but not kneeling!).
- Dad always led us in grace before meals. (Let me add, no one could possibly say it faster 😊.)
- Dad took us to worship every Sunday, every holy day.
- He never left the house for church without offering envelope tucked into his shirt pocket.
- He never said an unkind word about anyone. Over 97 years....

What faith practices come to mind when you think of **your** father, grandfather, or other father figure? Studies have shown that the influence of the male figure in the life of either a male or female child is enormous. If your child or grandchild idolizes you, and you

worship, they are more likely to, too. If they idolize you and you **don't** worship regularly, then chances are it isn't going to be important to them either. They're watching what you do and not just hearing what you say. When they move away or you're no longer here, what are the faith practices that are going to help them live abundantly, joyfully, hopefully, and that will help them endure suffering?

And don't say, "I'm not up to being a faith mentor!" The strength of heaven is at your disposal. The letter to the Romans says **we have access to grace** through our Lord Jesus Christ. When our Lord calls the apostles in today's Gospel He says:

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Matt. 9:37)

Shorthand for that: PRAY!! Look at that list of apostles, if you think you don't fit the bill:

- Simon Peter, who couldn't keep his foot out of his mouth and denied knowing him 3x.
- Matthew, a hated tax collector, who worked for the enemy and fleeced his own people.
- Simon the Cananaean, a Zealot who advocated the overthrow of the Roman regime.
- Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.

Dad always said a life lesson he learned in the Army was, "Never volunteer for anything." But he did, actually. He was a Eucharistic minister, and at one point he belonged to a men's group called the Holy Name. In the early 60's he was part of a team that visited local convenience stores and protested their sale of magazines in brown wrappers.

We need **you** because the world needs to hear that Jesus Christ is the Source of Life that defies death and hope that defies despair. Maybe you're not up for teaching Sun. School or reading in public or helping count the offering. Then again, maybe you **are** up for that. Or your service in the Lord's name could be inviting a stressed out or simply an unchurched friend to come to worship with you. It makes a difference to enter with and sit beside a

friend. It's the most convincing thing in the world for someone we know, love, respect, finds meaning in a faith community, finds strength for the day, solace in suffering, faith friends among whom joys are multiplied and sorrows divided.

A final thought from the *Lutheran Study Bible* on today's lesson from Romans:

Enduring suffering refines people. People who have been refined have hope because they place their future into God's hands, not their own.¹

I think that's what my Dad did, and I know that's what I hope to do. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

¹ *Lutheran Study Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), p. 1858.