

Father's Day

A little boy, when asked to explain Father's Day said, "It's like Mother's Day, only you don't spend as much on the present."

Obviously that is a joke, but in reality, Father's Day is not as big a holiday as Mother's Day. On Mother's Day there's traditionally higher attendance in churches, mothers often wear corsages, emotions run high & people gather at Mom's house – all to pay honor to Mom.

But on Father's Day the church is not as full, emotions are not as high & if anyone gets together to visit, isn't it usually the father that is stuck out on the grill cooking his own Father's Day meal and businesses do not profit as much. That is except for the telephone companies. As many of you know, Mother's Day is the busiest telephone day of the year – but Father's Day is the big money maker! There are more collect calls on Father's Day than on any other day of the year.

Maybe we're not as sentimental about Father's Day because, after all, many fathers are not as sensitive to children's needs or alert to sentiment as mothers are.

From the Old Testament reading you might get that impression at first. God just told Abraham to kill his son. Now, if we remember from our message on Mother's Day, this son was pretty special. Abraham and his wife were over 90 when Sarah got pregnant. So here is their son Isaac, I'm sure a strapping young man, and God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on the altar.

Now for us this might seem like an absolutely terrible thing. Sacrifice your own kid on the altar? But during Abraham's time, this wasn't that strange of an idea. There were many religious sects that believed in child sacrifice. So to Abraham, this wasn't necessarily that far out of an idea.

"Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son."

Okay, maybe Abraham wasn't that sensitive to his son's needs – but maybe he was. The story doesn't say – but I believe that Abraham was sad – possibly even crying while he was building the altar. Many of you may remember how Abraham pleaded to God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah. He was doing all kinds of bargaining with God. He told God, "If you find 50 righteous in Sodom, will you spare it? Then God said, okay for 50. Then Abraham said, How about 40" If he would do this for a city full of bad people, don't you think he probably did the same for his own son's life? And I am sure both father and son celebrated after God told him not to kill Isaac.

I like to believe father's can be a little more emotional or sentimental than we give them credit for.

The very first official Father's Day was June 19, 1924. It was made a holiday by President Calvin Coolidge. If you remember the message from Mother's Day, it was started because of a Methodist Woman. Well, I don't know if the woman who stated Father's Day was a Methodist or not, but she did get the idea during a Mother's Day church service while listening to the sermon. Sonora Smart Dodd, was raised by her father after her mother's death. Sonora wanted her father to know how special he was to her for all of his parental sacrifices & for being, in her eyes, so courageous, selfless & loving.

We all don't have that kind of image about our fathers. Some of us have a much different image of the father figure in our lives.

I read something this week entitled 50 Reasons Why It's Good To Be a Man. I won't read all of these stereotypes, but here a few I thought I would share:

A 5-day vacation requires only one suitcase
Car mechanics tell you the truth
Gray hair and wrinkles only add character
If another guy shows up at the party in the same outfit, you just might become lifelong buddies.
One wallet, one pair of shoes, one color, all seasons
You can do your nails with a pocketknife.

Okay, so Dad's are different.

In our Gospel reading today, we heard the story of a dad and two son's. It is a parable, or story, told by Jesus. It describes family relationships and how different members act.

If we think about it, we can probably place ourselves somewhere in that story or at one point in our lives we probably could have.

When I was younger and I heard this story, I thought – wow – how cool. Think what I could do if my parents gave me my inheritance now. I would love to say that I would have given a portion of it to the church and then use the rest to pay my way to seminary. Well, as a teenager, I can guarantee that isn't what I would have done. I am sure I would have squandered it in some way.

It makes me wonder – why did the father let his son have his inheritance early? And why did he let him leave? The story doesn't say that the father tried to talk his son out of going away – it doesn't say they had a fight – it doesn't even say he gave him a kiss goodbye – It just says that after a couple of days the son left. So why do you think he left? Age, wants to see what else is out there, sick and tired of dad and his big brother – who knows.

Maybe it was miscommunication. As I get older – I see this more and more as an issue between family, friends and acquaintances. Wars have been started over miscommunication, friendships ended over miscommunication, families have been broken because of miscommunication, churches have been split over simple miscommunication. So maybe that is why the son left, because of a miscommunication with his dad and brother. It is possible the son just wanted his inheritance early so he could invest it in the stock market and his family just assumed he wanted to go party with it. Miscommunication can happen.

So what can be done? We communicate all of the time. And with the English language, there are several ways that you can say one thing and the perception can be something completely different to the one listening to it.

Many years ago, a mentor of mine told me that “One’s Perception is their reality.” We can’t discount how someone feels based on their perception. That is what they feel is reality – no matter what we thought we said, how they perceived our words or actions is reality to them.

So what can we do? We are human, we are going to inadvertently say the wrong thing to someone close to us or someone will say something thing to us and we may perceive it wrong.

So what can we do if someone says or does something to us that we perceive as wrong or hurtful to us?

We can be like the younger son where at first he had to do probably the worst job possible – feeding pigs slop. He even thought the pig slop was appetizing because he was starving to death! Aren’t we all like that at times? Turn our back on the root of the problem and wishing we were someplace else.

I love the part where the son “comes to himself” and realizes even his dad’s servants live better than he was living. So he picked himself up, swallowed his pride, and went to his dad to ask to be a servant.

Wow – that is hard to do. Swallow your pride, put yourself out on the line. If someone has hurt us, sometimes talking to them in a calm manner is just the best thing that we can do. Yes they can turn their back on us – Like the dad could have done and said – no – get away from me. I’m dead to you and you to me. I owe you nothing more. He could have said that – and possibly been fully justified in doing so.

But he didn’t. Actually the story tells us that when the son was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion – he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

I just picture the father – every day – looking across the fields for his son – hoping, praying that he would return.

Aren't we like that as well sometimes. Maybe we had a disagreement with someone, or we got separated or we separated ourselves from friends or family for who knows what reason – but sometimes - something inside us wants to mend that relationship.

God wants the same thing as well. God gives us free will to walk away from him. But he is always there looking for us, waiting for us – ready to celebrate when we come back to him. We may swallow our pride and try to mend relationships with loved ones or friends, but we may get hurt again. But not with God. If we look to resolve old issues with Him, improve our relationship with Him or even come home to him – he will always put his arms around us and love us and proclaim that this son or daughter of mine was lost but now is found and have a celebration – no matter what we did – we just have to turn towards him.

Some of us can relate to the younger son, others of us the father. But I feel that many of us relate to the older brother. There he was, watching his little brother head off with a good portion of his dad's money. He was running off to do wild things and live without any regard for anyone else.

From reading the parable, we are led to believe that he the older brother had heard stories of what the younger brother was doing. Think about it – here you are busting your backside on the farm, every single day, working really hard – and your little brother runs off and is living life like it is one big party. And when you hear stories like “your brother did this or your brother did that” Wouldn't that bother you a little – I know it would bother me. I mean, why is he so special? Why does he get to have fun while I am always working? Then about the time you get him out of your mind, you stop hearing stories about him – and you stop feeling maybe a little jealous that he is always having fun without a worry in the world – you look up and notice that there is music and dancing going on in the house.

How strange – a party. Dad never mentioned a party. So you call a servant over and ask “What is going on?” Then they tell you that your brother – your younger brother – the one that went and spent a large portion of your dad’s money on parties, that this brother – who didn’t care enough about you or your dad to even stick around and help on the farm – that this brother was home. And not only was he home, but your dad – killed the special calf – the one that was specially fed for only the most special celebration. And not only did he kill the calf, but he gave your younger brother the best robe in the house – maybe it was your robe – then he put a special ring on his finger and sandals on his feet – so your brother was just welcomed back into your family. By your dad placing a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet, he put him on the same level as you. How dare he. How dare he.

Well, would you go in to put your arm around your brother and say welcome home? I don’t know if I could. It is one thing to suck up your pride and ask for forgiveness, but as hard as that is, it might just be harder to forgive others sometimes. Then what can happen? We get worked up and maybe say the wrong thing to someone else.

Like the older son said to his dad, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours comes back, who has devoured your property – you killed the fatted calf for him!” Maybe you are thinking, Dad loves him more.

Was the son justified with what he said? Maybe, probably. But did he know the whole story? Did he know that his brother was looking at pig slop going “mmmmm – dinner?” Did he know that his brother came back only to ask to be a servant? Did he know that his dad was hoping in his heart that his brother would come back. Did he know, that to his dad, it was like his brother came back from the dead?

No, he didn't. He didn't have the full story. In some ways, it was a misunderstanding. If he knew all of these things would it have made a difference? Maybe, maybe not. But at least he could begin to understand why – not that he would necessarily agree, but at least he could begin understanding and then start mending that relationship.

Relationships today are too fragile even disposable. Too often we get our feelings hurt, but instead of trying to reach out to the person we have an issue with, we simply retreat and say, I'm going to wait for them to apologize first.

This father's day, I am reminded very much of that fact. I had a misunderstanding with my dad about 7 years ago. I am not even sure what it was about. I got prideful and thought it was his turn to make the first move. His turn to apologize to me. His turn to do something.

Well, he did do something. He died a year and a half ago without us ever mending our relationship.

I learned my lesson – and it is a hard lesson to learn. Relationships can be hard to build but they can also be very fragile. We shouldn't be like the older brother – as easy and safe as that can be. We should strive to be like the father – looking for the opportunity to mend the relationship.

Sometimes we don't think of dads as sentimental or emotional but we all can be – not just dads, but mothers, sons and daughters. We all can learn from the father in this parable of Jesus to be forgiving and loving.

On Mother's Day, I left you with some words written by Erma Bombeck. It was a story about God sitting in his workroom creating the mold for a mother. Today being Father's Day, I thought I would leave you with yet another sampling of Erma's work concerning God making the mold for a father:

When the Lord was creating fathers, he started with a tall frame. An angle standing nearby said, 'What kind of father is that? If you're going to make children so close to the ground, why have you put fathers up so high? He won't be able to shoot marbles without kneeling. He won't be able to tuck a child into bed without bending. He won't even be able to kiss a child without stooping.' God smiled and said, 'Yes, but if I make him child size, who will the children have to look up to?'

Then God molded long legs & broad shoulders. The angel nearby had a heart attack. 'Boy, this is the end of the week all right! How's he going to pull a child close to him without the kid falling between his legs?'

God smiled & said, 'A mother needs a lap but a father needs strong shoulders to pull a sled, balance a kid on a bicycle, or hold a sleepy head on the way home from the circus.'

'God worked throughout the night, giving the father few words, but a firm voice and eyes that saw everything. Finally, almost as an afterthought, he added tears. Then He turned to the angel & said, 'Now are you satisfied that he can love as much as a mother?' And the angel was silent.

Mark Maddox, Pastor
Sanctuary UMF
520-780-4889
pastor@umcsanctuary.org