

A FATHER AND A SON
Father's Day –June 19, 2016 –Exodus 20: 12
The Church of the Covenant

I am writing this sermon as my 91 ½ year old Father is a patient in the hospital. I say, “91 1/2 years old” because at some point in your life you begin to add years to your age, rather than attempt to subtract them. I think the tipping point is about age 90. But writing this sermon this year for this Father's Day seems particularly poignant to me. And so I dedicate this sermon to my Father, who is listening via radio, and to the God he has so faithfully served with his life.

The relationship between A FATHER AND A SON is “dynamic” and by this I mean changeable over time. There are those difficult ages as we grow up –the “terrible twos”, the “rebellion of adolescence” (times when Fathers should have the right to “brain” their sons but don't), and those sort of emotionally distant, smoldering anger times when perhaps in our 20's we reject most of what our Father has taught us with his life. And then as the American humorist, Mark Twain, notes: “Sometime after I graduated from college I discovered that my Father had suddenly become the wisest man on the face of this earth.” Relationships between Fathers and Sons are “dynamic” as I like to say. But into this all we are to, as the Ten Commandments command, “*Honor our Fathers...that our days may be long.*” (Exodus 20:12)

The relationship between A FATHER AND A SON is also complicated by the fact that we men, as a general rule, are incapable of sharing our emotions, we tend to clam up when we should speak, we are not in touch with what is going on within our heart, we are inarticulate where the things of the heart are concerned. Taciturn. Un-speaking. Emotionally distant. --All those lovely characteristics and endearing charms that drive all you women in our lives a little bonkers. My Dad was raised by his Dad, who was a rather stern, Swedish old country kind of person, not taken to speak very much at all. You were to be the provider. Hard worker. The disciplinarian. You were supposed to be tough and strong. Nothing was capable of hurting you. Frugal and parsimonious and the keeper of the check book. The distant and aloof figure who could swoop in at a moment's notice and bring order out of chaos. The Viking leader of the family setting out from the fiord to conquer a foreign land and bring back spoil and plunder. You demonstrated your love for your family by what you did, not by what you said. My Father learned how to be a Father from his Father. And his Father, from his Father. And so on and so forth and so forth and so on, *ad infinitum*. Do we honor our Fathers by being just like their Fathers, or do we honor them another way????

A few years back when I was serving a church in downtown Pittsburgh we hosted a Spiritual Renewal Weekend and invited a great African-American preacher, the Rev. Dr. Jim Logan, to be our preacher for the week. On the last day of the last worship service there was to be an “altar call”. I know, I know, it isn't everyone's “cup of tea”. I have come to like them and will now share with you why. My Dad had developed severe pain in both his knees and probably had needed them to be replaced a few years before. You know, you know, we men like to “tough it out”; severe pain?, no problem; merely a flesh wound! But he could hardly walk and to walk from the parking garage, two blocks away, and up the steps, would render his knees worthless and painful the next day. So I sort of said to him –“Dad, its OK if you don't attend tonight.” But he was like a man possessed –O no, he and Mother were going. So we get to the end of the service and my parents are sitting toward the back of the crowd. And I am debating in my own head, “Do I go forward or not? I mean a long time ago I professed Jesus as Lord so I don't have to go forward again, right Lord?” And while I am locked in this internal debate I see my Dad dash forward and head to the chancel area. I mean, he's one of those super-private Presbyterians.

“Prayer is a private matter.” “What I believe is private to me.” “Faith is not emotional at all; its what’s in your head and what you believe that’s important.” As strange as it might seem, because I’m a Presbyterian minister, I never spoke with my Dad about our own faith very much. I mean, I always saw how dedicated he was to the church and how he served it with his life and attended worship every Sunday. I knew he had gone through Confirmation Class as a youth in his Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church with Rev. Sternant as pastor. He and Mother went to church every Sunday even at Bethany College. He’d say, “You Presbyterians are a bunch of pikers; in the Lutheran Church we had to attend Confirmation Class every Wednesday after school, never missing a class, for THREE YEARS!”. So I always assumed my Father was a strong believer. Private and taciturn in his faith, like the good Lutheran-terian he is, we never talked about it, however. So there is my Dad, almost running up the aisle of that church, and with his bad and painful knees, running up front to say to the world, with everyone watching, even his son, **“Yes, I believe in Jesus!”** My Mother had to run up the aisle about four steps behind him he was going so fast. And then his son figured out the answer to his prayer, got over himself a little bit, and ran up to join my Father and Mother as we prayed together as a family. I believe my Father was a believer in Jesus from his youth and that he would have gone to heaven without having run forward on that day. I really think that his coming forward in that church was more for me as his son to see it, than it was for him. But I know from that day forward *with absolute certainty* that there is a day coming when my Father and my Mother and I will all be united in heaven together. Thank you, Dad. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Lord. I HONOR my Father for the man he is and the man God created him to be.

So, men, don’t be afraid to express your faith in the Lord. Don’t be afraid to demonstrate to your children that you love them and you love the Lord. We are watching and waiting to see what you really believe. And we will HONOR you and we will HONOR God when we see you HONOR your earthly and your heavenly Father. We honor God when we express who we are and what we believe to our children, not when we keep our mouths shut and try to be strong, stoic, unspeaking, granite-like men.

One more thing, and with this I close. When I lived far away and would make my every-Sunday phone call home, I would always say over the years, “I love you” over the phone to my Dad. And in the beginning there was silence in return. And then when I said, “I love you”, then he would respond back “I love you”. And then there were times where unprompted my Dad would just open up and say “I love you” first, and I would respond “I love you.” And most recently he has told me how grateful he is to God who has allowed him the time to see me grow up into a fine man and the accomplishments I have made with my life. Men, never be afraid to express your love to your sons and daughters. We are waiting to hear from you. It is the age-old story of A FATHER AND A SON. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*