

August 28, 2016      “God Is Our Father”      Psalm 145:17-21

There are fundamentals to the Christian faith: bottom lines that we cannot ignore and that we cannot deny and remain what we are as Christian people, as the Christian Church. One of those fundamentals is the Biblical teaching concerning the Trinity. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is not a message on the Three in One, One in Three formula concerning God's nature. But it does nibble at the first part of that fundamental understanding of God's nature. God is our Father.

It is a legitimate question to ask, how do we get there. My father's name in its fulness is John William Mitchell. Everyone he worked with at Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Seven in Port Arthur called him Bill to his face, and Billy when he was not within earshot. My mother called him Billy and sometimes Willy. I was never tempted to call him by his name. He was my father, in every way and every experience. So how did I ever get comfortable calling God, God who is the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who through the Father and the Son pours the Holy Spirit into our midst? How did I ever get so familiar with God, so close to Him, that I dare to call HIM “Poppa”, “Daddy”, “Father”?

The fact is it was not my doing at all. The disciples of Jesus, (and as believers we are disciples of Jesus), Peter, James, John, Andrew and the rest of that bunch asked Jesus to do something very important. To teach them how to pray. And you know what happened next. Jesus replied, “Here is the recipe: “Our Father who is in heaven.” To be sure we learned in Shakespearian English...Our Father which art in heaven...but that is what those words mean. Jesus has taught all of us to call HIS Father, our Father. And of course the logical part of that lies in the claims of Genesis 1-3 that God created

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all that is by nature and by grace on this planet and in the sky above. Because God is the One who made everything that is made, Jesus says we may and we can call HIM our Father.

That being said, that God the Son has told us to pray using the words our Father to address His Father, we turn to Psalm 145 and specifically verses 17 -21 in that Psalm to learn more about the nature of God who is our Father. There is a trend that I really do not enjoy or appreciate to use inclusive language in our worship materials. To edit out terms that designate God as Father, as Son, or as Brother because that emphasizes a “belief” that God is masculine in nature. I resist that trend because the Scripture while presenting no treatise that God is masculine in the “human” sense, the Scriptures illustrate a profound comfort zone that masculine terms are appropriate in addressing the Lord God Almighty. I was surprised when the Moderator of June's General Assembly was challenged from the floor by one of our ministers for consistently addressing God as Father in his prayers. When the Moderator is challenged, the wise ones, and the Rev. Doug Rollwage has always witnessed a good measure of wisdom, asked the Assembly to uphold his right to address God in that fashion. And the Assembly did. Praise God. But I make the point...it is not that God is our Father in the human sense of that term. Indeed it has to do with the nature of God as The Creator, and at the specific direction of Jesus that we choose to use that term. God is our Father.

Psalm 145 helps us to understand a little more about why that is appropriate. Verse 17 of Psalm 145. “The Lord is righteous in all His ways.” I am a father. You have met my son Matthew, our first child. And you have met my daughter Rebekah, the Rev. Rebekah Mitchell. I can tell you that they both love me. I can tell you with out

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any fear of consequences whatsoever that they respect me. I could show you the birthday cards in which they pay me (in their own words) the deepest and dearest compliments about my role as their father. But I can also tell you...they do not think of me as being righteous in all my ways. For that matter I know that my wife, loving me as she does and always has would not concede I am righteous in all my ways.

What does that phrase mean. Well for starters it means in everything I have done, I have always, always, without fail been right. I can tell you I would like to believe it is true. But the fact is even I know it is not. I make mistakes. And while I have an incredible record as a man, a father, a husband, I am guilty of sin, I am made of the same dust as everyone else. My soul craves forgiveness for the errors of my ways. I am human, limited, soiled by my belief in my strength and my wisdom and even my faith. So who is this figure who is righteous in all his ways, in everything He does? He is God. And He made a choice when He was creating all that is, to make us, our kind, male and female. He chose to become our Father. Not like our earthly Father. The One Father who has never made a mistake. I do not understand every detail of this but I get the point. God did not make a mistake when he gave life to Judas Iscariot, or to Pontius Pilate, or to Adolf Hitler, or to me and you. As Mahalia Jackson said so long ago... "God don't make no junk." He is righteous in all his ways. Unlike any of us...HE has never made a mistake. You see? We are not talking about human nature, masculine or feminine. He is righteous in all his ways.

Psalm 145 says God is "near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth." There can be no question that statement is about the bond that exists between God who is our Father and us." I am incapable of that kind of bond even with my

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children, and they only live 2 to 2 and ½ hours away. I can't be with them where they are when difficulty arises, or challenges cross their path. I am very simply so limited by space and time. And I have learned the hard way, you can listen to people on the telephone, even using skype so that they can see you and you can see them. It's not the same as being near enough to hold them as they weep or when they hurt and have to deal with failure...as all of us must. God is our Father and HE is not limited by time and space as we are. HE is not a created being. HE has always been there. HE is the very stuff of eternity. Holy and timeless. Not bound by time as I am. Do not compare God the Father to our human fathers. HE is our Father. But that is because HE is always God. Near to those who call upon HIM, sincere in that calling, sincere in prayer.

Verse 19 says God is this kind of Father: “He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cries and he saves them.” One of the major differences between people and the Lord our God is this issue the Bible calls sin. For those who fear God there is this need to be forgiven the sins that we know we have committed. We may never talk about them with other people...although there are times when we need the forgiveness of people around us whom we have hurt and harmed, even through the carelessness of what we chanced to say, let alone the carelessness of things we have actually done to others. Sin is real. Sin is the chaos factor in our lives. It is the reality of our being inconsistent. So on the one hand we profess our faith and on the other we break the commandments of God and we do harm. So often it is not even what we do, so much as what we fail to do. Failing to follow through, to keep our word, to keep our appointments, to keep our promises.

Our deepest need as human beings is to experience the

forgiveness of our Heavenly Father because we have sinned, because we are not perfect as God is. Our Father who is God, fulfills the desires of those who fear him. Nancy sang the words for us 2 weeks ago. The words begin with the phrase I believe. And the words testify to this singular truth...He'll always say I forgive. And that is what is being talked about here when verse 19 goes on to say in specific terms... “He hears their cry, the cry of the wounded soul, wounded by wrongdoing that affects others. He hears their cry and He, our Heavenly Father, saves them. Saves us.

Some of us suffer from a double dose of this need to be forgiven. Our Father forgives us and we continue to hang on to the sense of unworthiness that brought us to our knees in the first place. We refuse to forgive ourselves. We refuse to celebrate the fact that the grace of God is real and that our sin has been forgiven. No, we celebrate instead that we are so bad, we could not possibly deserve that God would save us. Some people nullify the cross, continuing to bathe in what they did wrong, long after God has forgiven them. God saves. That means if we have asked to be forgiven we are forgiven! And therefore we need to recognize the fact of our salvation. Not because we did the right thing in taking our burden to God, but because God is our Father, and would never hand us a stone, a greater burden, when we asked for the bread of life in Jesus Christ.

Finally, “The Lord watches over all who love him,” Our heavenly Father is watching over us, protecting us, redirecting traffic and trouble around us, lifting us up so that it goes under us, changing things so there are near misses, the result of which is we do not get hurt. That does not mean you will never fall sick, never age, never die. Truth: sickness, aging, death have their place and play their role in a fallen and sinful world. We are not immune from the

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fact we live in a sin rich environment. What we need to cling to, and hold on to fiercely, is that our Father is watching over us in a way our earthly fathers never could or can. Take your steps in the real world boldly knowing you are not alone, and your Father who loves you and saved and saves you is watching to keep you safe...no matter what. No matter what.

You see it is not stale dogma, or dusty old doctrine foisted upon people by the church centuries ago. It is real. It is solid. And it is Biblical truth. Jesus said so. Psalm 145 celebrates it. God is our Father.

Let us pray;

Father, dear Heavenly Father. Thank you for the way Scripture reveals the model of your being our Father is not that of earthly fathers, but rather of the One who is holy, always right, always faithful, always caring. We praise your name that we may take courage and be encouraged by the fact that you are always near to us, as near as our whispering a prayer in the morning. We thank you that the deepest needs of our lives, our hearts, our minds our souls and bodies are met in the grace you have poured out upon us in Jesus Christ your Son, crucified and risen. We rejoice that you hear our cries. We recognize that our salvation is always in every circumstance because we are held in the embrace of your sacred hands. Thank you that being God you chose and you choose to be our Father. In Christ's name we pray. Amen