“A FEW GOOD MEN”

Proverbs 3:5, 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 June 19th, 2016

This morning we take a break from our series on Luke using the Lectionary texts and instead observe Father’s Day. Comedian George Burns is said to have noted, “The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible.” Now one of the men from the congregation told me after a short sermon that I didn’t even give him time for a good nap that morning! So I will try to find that happy medium this morning!

Recently I have a new favorite country-western song. It’s “Humble and Kind” by Tim McGraw. The first time I heard it I thought, “Now, that would be good in a sermon someday.” And Father’s Day seems to be the perfect time for it! I’m sure most of you have heard it, too, by now. The chorus goes,

“Hold the door, say please, say thank you
Don’t steal, don’t cheat, and don’t lie
I know you got mountains to climb but
Always stay humble and kind
When the dreams you’re dreamin’ come to you
When the work you put in is realized
Let yourself feel the pride but
Always stay humble and kind.”

Yesterday was our 27th wedding anniversary. George and I actually celebrated it on Tuesday night by going out to dinner at a nice restaurant in Cheyenne. I am so thankful that I have been blessed by one of those “good men” in my life. Many of you who know him know what a sweet spirit he is—and definitely “humble and kind.” That doesn’t mean he doesn’t enjoy a joke but he
has that dry humor & tells his stories with such seriousness that sometimes it’s hard to tell if he is serious or not! I remember him asking a young friend of my daughter, Marjorie, if she had had the air in her tires checked. He warned her that it was time to change her winter air over to her summer air because they weren’t the same so it would damage the car to leave that old winter air in her tires!! It wasn’t until she heard me giggling that she knew he was teasing her!!

“Humble and Kind,” “A Few Good Men.” We have all been blessed by those men in our lives! They might be our fathers, our children’s fathers, other men who have mentored us at various times along the way, or those men who have been such wonderful role models in our lives that we have been inspired by their examples. You may be making a list in your mind right now of those men or thinking of that one special one who is such a treasure to you. And they may be men who have passed out of this life or ones who are thankfully very present in your life now and the lives of your children or grandchildren!!

One of my favorite comic strips is “Rose is Rose.” It’s shows the events of one day with this little boy, Pasquale, and his father. It begins with the two of them in front of the T.V. watching a baseball game with a big bowl of popcorn in their laps. Then they are climbing a tree together with the little boy watching with a smile on his face as his dad clutches a branch near him with a sense of desperation. Next they are laying side by side on the floor reading comic books and that’s followed by Pasquale doing a cannon ball into the wading pool, splashing his dad big time! They play hide-and-go-seek and then they are laying on the couch with Pasquale’s head on his dad’s lap, taking a nap. They end the day with roasting marshmallows over a campfire. The last frame shows Dad saying, “Hey! A shooting star! Make a wish, Pasquale!” The little boy replies, “I’m good! I’ll let
someone else get their wish!” They were both content with the time they had spent together—father and son and that “quality time.” Both of their wishes came true!!!

Unfortunately, we have not all had fathers like that. My father was an abusive, alchoholic and I spent my early years trying to be invisible so he wouldn’t know I was around. But I knew in my heart that I had to forgive him. I wasn’t able to do that until years after he had passed away when I went on my “Walk to Emmaus.” **Forgive your father.** Many times at funerals of older men, we learn that one or more of the adult children are carrying grievances against the deceased for something he did ages ago or should have done and failed. But we must acknowledge that our fathers were/are human and so they do make mistakes. But who among us has not sinned? And we will want our children to forgive us.

On the cross, the Lord Jesus looked at His executioners surrounding him. “Father, forgive them,” he prayed. “They know not what they do” (Luke 23:34) In this case, we say, “Forgive your father. He may or may not have known what he was doing. Forgive him anyway.”

One of the shining lights of Jewish history was King David, the singer and poet, the man after God’s own heart, the epitome of what a godly ruler should be. However, to some of his children, he was anything but an example and role model. II Samuel 12-18 tells the story of Absalom, a young man of extraordinary promise who life was hijacked by the assault of his sister by a half-brother. When he saw his father David intended to do nothing about it, Absalom, killed the perpetrator, Amnon. Then, he fled for his life, knowing that surely David would be enraged and would punish him. To his amazement, David once again passively stood by and did nothing. Gradually, Absalom was filled with rage against his father. Eventually he led a full-scale rebellion to overthrow the throne and seize
the kingdom, resulting in his own death.

One can just hear Absalom saying aloud about his father David, “Yes, he’s such a godly man. Ha! Such a man after God’s own heart! What a joke! He’s such a hypocrite.” It would not be the first time a church leader’s child knew his/her father differently from how the world saw him and came to entirely different conclusions about him. We can’t fault Absalom for his anger. He had every right to fault David for his negligence as a parent as well as his failure as the king. We could wish, however, that Absalom had found it in his heart to forgive his father. His hatred, his resentment and anger, ended up destroying him and bringing great suffering to the kingdom.

Here are some reasons to forgive your father…

He’s human. That means he is inclined to some failures and a great deal short of perfect. According to Romans 3:23, we have all “come short of the glory of God.” And Psalm 103:14 reminds us that God is all too well aware of this: “He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.”

You are too. This means two things: you are a lot like your dad insofar as being flawed. And, being human, you will require an extra dose of God’s grace to be able to forgive him.

Your father is the product of a fallen world and his own flawed parents. It’s easy to think of your father as choosing to become (insert here whatever he became --an alcoholic, a wife-beater, a party-animal, whatever) and thus holding him totally responsible. However, remember that he was a child once too, and God alone knows to what extent he became whatever he was due to his parent’s failures, the fault of the schooling he received or did not receive, and other influences.

You will eventually want mercy too. Therefore, you would do well to show
Forgiveness opens the grace channel. And resentment clogs it up and shuts off the daily supply of God’s grace you and I continually need.

Pastor Gary Inrig writes, “Forgiveness is ultimately an act of the will, not a stirring of the emotions. For a Christ-follower, it is a choice to obey God and let it go. This is an inward choice that produces a declaration given, a promise spoken: “I forgive you.’ When we speak those words, we declare that the issue between us is dead and buried. We’re saying that we will not rehearse it, review it, or renew it. When it comes to our minds, we will take it to the Lord and to the foot of the cross, not to you.”

Let’s get back to those Godly men, those few good men, shall we? Thank God we have some of them here and we do celebrate their presence in our lives. Good men are men who have learned to lean on the Lord. As we heard in Proverbs 3:5, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” They have learned to lean on the Lord for Salvation. In Ephesians 2:8-9 it says “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not you own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” And these good men have learned to lean on the Lord for strength. In Isaiah 40:30-31 we read “Even the youths will faint and be weary, and the young men will fall exhausted but those that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” Lean on the Lord, friends, lean on Him for salvation and for strength.

We have discussed several different kinds of fathers today. Our scripture from 1 Corinthians described different kinds of gifts, different kinds of service,
different kinds of working, “but in all of them and in everyone it is the same
God at work.” Gayle Lintz illustrated this scripture with a story about her dad.

“I was in high school when my dad started jogging. He bought some
blue running shoes and running clothes. Also, he bought a night-light for the
kitchen, to help him get easily through the house in the early morning darkness,
on his way out to jog. He switched it on each evening at bedtime, and switched
if off after his early morning run. It worked for many, many months.

He was befuddled when it quit working. He unplugged it, removed the
bulb, and got out his tools. He worked and worked trying to figure out the
problem and repair it. No luck. He took it completely apart and finally just
threw out all the pieces. Mother liked the look of the old one, so they bought
another one just like it. At home, they plugged it in, and we all admired the
soft glow. Dad said he hoped this little fixture would last longer than the
previous one. Then someone remarked that, wouldn’t it be funny if the pro-
blem wasn’t the fixture but…

“I kept that other bulb,” Dad said. He retrieved the old bulb and put
it into the new night-light. Plugged it in; switched it on. Nothing. He looked
ruefully at the trash can. Apparently, he had dismantled a perfectly good
night-light just because the bulb had burned out.

Many dads are good with their hands. They can fix anything. They
have great tools and know how to use them.

My dad was good with his words. In the army, he was a whiz at
transmitting and receiving Morse code. In college, after the war, he seesawed
between being a college English professor or becoming a lawyer. (He went
with law.) He taught adult Sunday School for forty years. For ten years, also
during that time, he taught children’s church. He established a Toastmaster’s group at his workplace and even stayed active with them for twenty years after he retired. He might not have been skilled with tools, but he was a master at writing and speaking.

I still see, daily, the example of his less-than-perfect handyman skills. I live with my family in my childhood home. In the master bedroom, often several times a day, I turn the light on and off. However, this night-light operates a bit differently. I have to push the switch down to turn the light on and push it up to turn it off (backward from a typical night-light switch). Many years ago, when the switch stopped working, at some point in the past, Dad had gotten out his tools and replaced the defective one, installing the new one upside down. It’s a lasting reminder to me that nobody’s an expert in everything.

God gifts us all differently. We just need to figure out what we’re good at and when we need to ask for help.”

Parenting is never easy. It is not easy, being a father or a mother. It has incredible challenges, incredible pains, as well as incredible joys. We can do no better thing for our children than personally walking in the way we should go. To Be mature in the Faith and to be continually open to the Transforming power of Christ.

In closing I’d like to share a final story—this one about a humble, consecrated pastor whose young son had become very ill. After his young boy had undergone an exhaustive series of tests, the father was told the shocking news that his son had a terminal illness. The youngster had accepted Christ as his Savior, so the minister knew that death would usher him into Glory. But he wondered how to inform one in the bloom of youth that he soon would die.
After earnestly seeking the direction of the Holy Spirit, he went with a heavy heart through the hospital ward to his son’s bedside. First he read a passage of Scripture and had a time of prayer with his son. Then he gently told him that the doctors could promise him only a few more days to live. “Are you afraid to meet Jesus, my son?” asked his devout father.

Blinking away a few tears, the little fellow said bravely, “No, not if He’s like you, Dad!”

Friends, the best thing we can do for our children and grandchildren is for each one of us to personally be right with God and to walk in the way of the Lord. To never be satisfied but to continually seek to be transformed into the image of Christ. To lean on the Lord for salvation and strength and to “always stay humble and kind.” God bless you all! Amen and amen.