

“KNOCKING ON THE DOOR”

Luke 11:1-13 June 18th, 2017

Often on Mother’s Day or Father’s Day we hear the scripture from Exodus 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother; so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” Father’s Day is here and we celebrate the fathers in our lives today—both past and present. I’ll begin this morning with a story by P. Reginald Legume called “Father’s Day in Church (An Extravagant Exaggeration)” that highlights some perceived differences in how we honor our mothers and fathers on their special day.

“Father’s Day...That magical day in a man’s life where his kids and his wife buy him a lot of expensive presents, take him out to a fancy restaurant, and then hand him the bill.

In a lot of ways, Father’s Day is a lot like Mother’s Day (HA!). Unless of course you find yourself in church, which is what I would like to examine today

Let’s compare the two:

MOTHER’S DAY IN CHURCH It’s Mother’s Day...spring is in the air! Time to pack all those screaming rebellious little munchkins into the car and head off for a relaxing morning at church.

So what does Mom get on her special Sunday?

She gets a beautiful flower! She gets to hear a tender, encouraging, heartfelt sermon extolling the blessings of a godly mother. Everyone stands to applaud her love, grace, dedication, hard work, and beautiful, shiny hair. Then, after wiping away tears of joy, she and everyone else in her extended family are whisked away to Cracker Barrel where they have a wonderful, relaxing meal, and as previously stated—Dad is handed a bill from the gift shop for nine thousand three hundred seventy-eight dollars and sixty-two cents

Now let's take a look at: FATHER'S DAY IN CHURCH

So what does Dad get on *his* special Sunday? *He gets yelled at for forty-five minutes, of course!* Then, just as he's about ready to crawl into a Dumpster and curl up in a fetal position, Dad is handed a helpful little bookfilled with expert advice from godly men (like myself) who actually *know* how to raise a normal, well-adjusted, lemon-scented family (no comment). These helpful brothers in Christ remind Dad in no uncertain terms that he could *definitely* be doing a much better job, and he better get busy doing it right now *or no more Cracker Barrel for you*, you good-for-nothing, golf-club swinging, lard covered old toot.

But does the fun end there? Not for good old Dad, it doesn't! After packing his precious little angels into the car and driving them safely home, Dad gets to cut the grass, wash the car, walk the dog, trim the hedges, prune the trees, clean the gutters, replace the screen door, tar the driveway, paint the kitchen, fish Malibu Barbie out of the fish tank, and, if he's been a *really* good boy, get stung by bees.

Now, as my wife will gladly tell you (assuming you don't actually *ask* her) I'm not one to complain. But being a dad is my favorite thing. I have a beautiful wife and two great kids who, even though they're pretty much all grown-up, still like to play with me once in a while. You can't buy *that* at Cracker Barrel or *anywhere else*.

That's the best Father's Day gift any dad could ever receive!"

Now, I'm hoping that this exaggerated story brought you a chuckle or two and your Father's Day gifts were of the memory-making kind, not the check-book kind. And I guess that we've slipped up a little because instead of a book of advice you got chocolate chip cookies!!!!

Today our text that Monty read for us is about the parable of the friend at midnight. It is one of several parables that only appear in Luke. The prodigal son and the Good Samaritan are two others unique to Luke's gospel. Before the parable comes the Lord's Prayer, which emphasizes Jesus' close, prayerful relationship with God envisioned as Father. After the parable comes the admonition to persevere in prayer to God.

When you come to the front door of the parsonage, you might not notice the little round peep-hole in the door that lets me check to see who is standing on my front step. The idea is that then I have a choice about whether or not to answer the door and let that person inside my home.

You couldn't get away with not answering the door in a first century Palestinian village. You wouldn't grumble and try to get out of giving bread to the friend at midnight standing at your door, either. Everyone in the village baked their bread at the village oven. They all know who has fresh bread. He's the one. The custom is that you serve fresh bread to company. Plus the houses were so close together that when the needy friend stands on your doorstep pounding on your door at midnight, everybody up and down the street knows they're there and you're not getting out of bed to help them. To grumble like this would bring shame on one's family and one's village. And nobody in that village 2,000 years ago would want to be the one to destroy its reputation for gracious hospitality to travelers with their grumbling.

Father's Day is a day when we stand on our father's doorstep and offer him thanks. How do you thank a good father? Maybe with a hand-made card filled with lots of love, perhaps with a special breakfast with all his favorites, or it could be with a hug and an "I love you, Dad". For this year with George it will be a set

of new pajamas and probably a bucket of KFC to enjoy on the patio with family.

Alyce M. McKenzie tells this story about her father:

My father was a tall man with dark hair, a great sense of humor and a great love for his children. He was really patient when we were sick. When I was little and sick, he would gather me up on his lap, wrap me in a blanket and rock me in the rocking chair, and say, ‘Miss Alyce, I’d take this big bad sickness from you if I could.’”

When his liver cancer, after a year of remission, came back in 2002, it was my turn to say to him, “Dad, I’d take this big bad sickness from you if I could.” “Hey,” he said, “that’s my line.” He was in a bed with metal rails set up in his study at the back of the house. The wonderful hospice saints were coming every day. The night before he died, in the early hours of morning, my husband Murry and I sat on either side of his bed in the darkened room, praying. On my side, I found myself repeating a prayer over and over again. An ancient prayer, A prayer that tells us so much about God in so few words: “Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins.”

I’m not a father but I can recognize a good father when I see one. A good father, in terms of our parable, is someone you can count on to come to the door and offer you nourishment when you show up on his doorstep. A good father offers you an egg or a fish, not a snake or a scorpion. A goof father is someone who, even though he recognizes your number on the incoming call, still answers the phone when you call and offers you encouragement.

A good father, in Luke’s view, is one who doesn’t just wait inside the manor house for you to come crawling back home, but who, throwing dignity to the wind, runs down the path to meet you with tears on his face. A good father, in Luke’s view, is one who comes out to where you’re lying in the ditch, beaten

up by life, and picks you up, binds your wounds and loves you into healing. Maybe you've never known a father like that. I didn't. But maybe you have and maybe you do!!

Jesus began his prayer, "Father," not because he wanted people to equate God with their human fathers. God knows and we know human parents can hurt as well as heal. Jesus prayed "Our Father," realizing that God's identity and purposes exceed our ability to understand or even speak of them. But he also knew that we human beings, with our limited knowledge, need to make comparisons between God and what we know. We know about family relationships, at least what they could be. The prophet Isaiah portrays God as a mother, picking up her young and carrying them when they are tired. Jesus himself depicts God as a mother hen shielding her people under her wings.

When he prayed what we call The Lord's Prayer, Jesus was remembering a daily prayer he had heard prayed in the synagogue called the Kaddish, a prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God. "Exalted and hallowed be his great name in the world which he created according to his will...May he let his kingdom rule in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel, speedily and soon." Jesus' prayer was a simpler, more direct, personal version of this prayer.

"Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins." This is the prayer that often comes to our mind when we need to reach out to God in times of trial and trouble, in times of the approach of the death of a loved one. It addresses a God who is honorable (hallowed be your name), who is accessible (your kingdom come), who is dependable (give us this day our daily bread) and who is a merciful God (forgive

us our sins). This is the God to whom Jesus prayed and taught us to pray. This is the loving, merciful God who waits for us when we return home.

Actor Burt Reynolds tells about his dad in an interview with Barbara Walters years ago. His dad was a sheriff in a small Southern town, beloved by everyone, but strict with his son. Burt respected and feared him, but yearned for some sign of tenderness or approval. But said, “Our family lived by two simple rules: “No crying. No hugging.” He went on, “There is a saying in the South that ‘no man is a man until his father tells him he is,’ and I hadn’t yet gotten that message from my father. I kept hoping someday I’d hear it.”

In the meantime, his hopes of being a professional football player were destroyed by an injury and his hopes of being an actor were growing dim. They told him he looked like Marlon Brando, but that he didn’t have any talent. A few bit parts in his twenties left him, at age 32, the best-known unknown in Hollywood.

Then his marriage to Judy Carne hit the rocks. This would be the first divorce in his family. He remembers staring at the phone, knowing he had to call home and break the news, but afraid that his dad would come to the phone instead of his mother. Yet, wanting more than anything to hear his father’s voice—standing there, staring at the phone, not able to make himself pick it up.

When people called upon Jesus—who did they meet when he opened the door? Who did they hear on the other end of the line?

~To his disciples, panicking in a storm at sea, “Help us, we are perishing in this high gale! (Luke 8:22:1ff calming of storm)

~To Jairus, a leader in the synagogue who fell at Jesus’ feet, “My 12 year old daughter is at the point of death (Luke 8:40)

~To a woman who fell at Jesus’ feet and begged for mercy “I have suffered from a flow of blood for 12 years.” (Luke 8:47)

~To a leper, who had suffered physical pain and social isolation for years, fell at Jesus' feet and asked "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean!" (Lk. 5:12)

Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and said, "I do choose. Be made clean!"

When they called upon him, knocked on his door, they were met by a person who had bread to give and who gave it gladly. How? Because he prayed. Early in the morning in a quiet place, late in the evening in the mountains, in a garden, while the footsteps of his betrayers approached and his closest friends on earth lay sleeping. He prayed.

He gives us this advice about prayer in our lives. Ask and it will be given to you. Search and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

How did he know that? He knew because his tradition from Scripture and synagogue told him that God will pour out blessings on the one who asks and seeks and knocks. But *how* did he know that? He knew from a lifetime of praying to a God who is honorable, accessible, dependable, and merciful.

After staring at the telephone on the table, dreading calling home to tell the news of his pending divorce, Burt Reynolds says he finally picked up the phone, dialed his parent's number with shaking hands, and, thank God, got his mother on the phone. "Mom, Judy and I are getting a divorce. No, it's final. Mom, tell him I'm sorry. Tell him I've failed again, and that I'm sorry." "Then," he says, "I heard this other voice on the phone. "Why don't you come on home, son," my father said, "and let me tell you about all the times I've failed in my life?"

Suppose the doorbell rings and without thinking or checking to see who it might be, you went to the door and opened it. And suppose God was standing on your porch. You chew on your lower lip and ask nervously, “How can I help you?”

God raised an eyebrow and said, “It’s the other way around, or have you so soon forgotten what you said to me last night? I was listening. I certainly wasn’t sleeping. And I distinctly remember,” says God, “that at approximately 12:01 this morning, as you lay in your bed with anxious thoughts rattling around in your mind, you called out to me.”

God continued, “I clearly remember what you said next. You said, ‘Lord, you are calling me to be a friend at midnight to others. Come to me, now, be my friend at midnight. I need some bread.’”

“Why do you look so surprised to see me? Did you think I wouldn’t come to the door? Well, here I am, as promised. Are you going to let me in?”

Are you going to let me in?