

FATHERS, DON'T LOWER THE STANDARD; RAISE THE CHILD!



Mother's Day became an official holiday in 1914; Father's Day, not until 1972. Mother's Day is still the busiest day of the year for florists, restaurants and long-distance phone companies. Father's Day is the day on which the most collect phone calls are made. According to LifeWay Research Group, Father's Day is the holiday with the single lowest average church attendance – statistically lower than Labor Day, Memorial Day and even the Fourth of July. This is interesting, especially when you consider that Mother's Day tends to be the

day with the third highest church service attendance, after Easter and Christmas. Surely there are other factors involved, including travel and the time of year. On Mother's Day school is still in session, on Father's Day it isn't – so families travel to visit relatives or to go on vacation.

Fathers: we can't escape these statistics that demonstrate the influence a godly father has for his family. According to data collected by Promise Keepers and Baptist Press, if a father does not go to church, even if his wife does, only 1 child in 50 will become a regular worshiper. If a father does go regularly, regardless of what the mother does, between two-thirds and three-quarters of their children will attend church as adults. When the father is the spiritual head of his home, there's a 93% probability everyone else in the household will serve the Lord as well.

Now someone might say, "Well, that's just a sign of the times. The conventional family of one man and one woman and 3.6 children doesn't exist anymore. There are many single parent homes and broken marriages. Church attendance isn't what it was - especially after COVID. So what is one to do?" This is a difficult culture in which to raise a family. But do we lower the standard or raise the child?

One of the questions for catechumen questioning is: Can anyone keep the Law perfectly? (I admit this is a trick question.) **How would you answer?** Many, maybe even you, would answer absolutely not. But I have instructed my catechumens to answer: Yes, with the grace of God. The church father Augustine said, "All the commandments of God are kept perfectly when all the commandments that are broken are forgiven." Therefore, fathers, followers of Christ, don't just throw your hands up in frustration at this sinful world in which we live. **Don't lower the bar of God's perfection. Raise the child in the grace of Christ.**

Therefore, fathers (and all sinners), **take courage**. This Sunday's Gospel text is for you. Jesus served for you so that you can have **faith over fear**. Jesus rebuked the wind and the sea. **He did not rebuke His disciples.** (Likewise, Jesus isn't rebuking fathers but He came to forgive every failure and restore them to their position of influence.) That's an important point that all of us need to realize, to understand our Savior and why He is here for us. He **DOES** care for

us. He rebuked the wind and the sea when He told them “Peace! Be still!” He did not rebuke His disciples when He said to them, “Have you still no faith?” Yet I think many people hear these words of Jesus in the Holy Gospel as Law, as rebuke or accusation, as an indictment. Is that what Jesus was saying to His frightened disciples, who, troubled by a storm that was so intense that it scared the bequebers out of experienced sea-faring fishermen, went running and screaming to Him for help?

Is that how Jesus wants us to think? Certainly not. This is not at all what those words mean, and such thinking will not make us better or stronger Christians but will, in fact, drive us to despair and failure. Christ wants us to have more faith and a stronger faith in Him, but our faith is not something that we can do, or that we can increase and strengthen by ourselves.

In the explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed we confess that “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him.” No, faith is a gift, not something that Jesus commands us to do. And secondly, these words are not words of rebuke because if they were, it would be a great confusion of Law and Gospel. Because the Law is not given to kick us when we’re down, or to frighten us more when we are scared, or to chastise us when He knows how helpless and vulnerable we are. No, it’s exactly at those moments that God gives us His Gospel – that He would strengthen us in our doubts and fears; that He would grant forgiveness when our sins and inability are weighing heavy on us; that He would be for us all what we are not and all that we lack. No, He does not rebuke us when we come to Him for help. He alone has a word that forgives failure, restores us with faith over fear, and upholds us in our times of trouble. When you’re on a boat out in the middle of the sea, and a storm comes up, **there’s NO place to go if something goes wrong**. Well, except the ONE PLACE that’s always there - Jesus. That is one of the roles of a father - point them to Jesus - the One whom the wind and the sea obey.

Charles Kettering once said, “No one would have ever crossed the ocean if he could have gotten off the ship in the storm.” When the power of the wind and the water are unleashed together, it can be life threatening and it gives one a helpless, powerless feeling. But in the middle of that furious storm, Jesus taught His disciples the importance of faith over fear. **Please note** that Jesus isn’t talking about saving faith here: Saving faith is believing that Jesus is our Savior from sin, death, grave and the power of the devil. Saving faith doesn’t waver every time the going gets tough. But sanctified faith is the faith of our everyday walk with God - and sin, storms and troubles can cause this faith to waver. Therefore, Jesus teaches us about storms, about Himself and then about who we are as faith-filled people in the midst of these storms. Sometimes the Lord calms the storm. Sometimes He lets the storm rage and calms His child. Earthly fathers are tasked with the same calming presence in the midst of the challenges, struggles and fears of this world.

Every pastor has their favorite illustrations for a sermon or Bible study. The following illustration is one of my favorites, not because of its comfort, but rather **because of its challenge to me**

every day as a father and grandfather. It challenges me to never lower the standard but to raise the child, the grandchild, the family, the neighborhood, the work place with the sharing of the Gospel. Here's the story:

After a few of the usual Sunday evening hymns, the church's pastor slowly stood up, walked over to the pulpit, and gave a very brief introduction of the friend he had known since childhood. With that, an elderly man stepped up to the pulpit to speak, "A father, his son, and a friend of his son were sailing off the Pacific Coast," he began, "when a fast-approaching storm blocked any attempt to get back to shore. The waves were so high, that even though the father was an experienced sailor, he could not keep the boat upright, and the three were swept into the ocean."

The old man hesitated for a moment, making eye contact with two teenagers who were, for the first time since the service began, looking somewhat interested in his story. He continued, "The father, being a good swimmer, was able to make it back on the boat. Grabbing a rescue line, he then had to make the most excruciating decision of his life - to which boy would he throw the other end of the line. He had only seconds to make the decision. The father knew that his son was a Christian, and he also knew that his son's friend was not. The agony of his decision could not be matched by the torrent of waves. **As the father yelled out, "I love you, son!" he threw the rescue line to his son's friend.** By the time he pulled the friend back to the capsized boat, his son had disappeared beyond raging swells into the black of night. His body was never recovered."

By this time, the two teenagers were sitting straighter in the pew, awaiting the next words to come out of the old man's mouth. "The father," he continued, "knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus, and he could not bear the thought of his son's friend stepping into an eternity without Jesus. Therefore, he sacrificed his son. "How great is the love of God that He should do the same for us." With that, the old man turned and sat back down in his chair as silence filled the room.

Within minutes after the service ended, the two teenagers were at the old man's side. "That was a nice story," one of the boys politely started, "but I don't think it was very realistic for a father to give up his son's life in hopes that the other boy would become a Christian." "Well, you've got a point there," the old man replied, glancing down at his well-worn Bible. A big smile broadened his narrow face, and he once again looked up at the boys and said, "It doesn't sound very realistic, does it? But I'm standing here today to tell you that my story gives me a glimpse of what it must have been like for God to give up His Son for me." He paused for a moment, and then continued, **"And you see, I was that father, and your pastor is my son's friend."**

With all the responsibilities of raising a family today - can there be anything more important than making sure that your child(ren), your grandchild(ren) believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior? Absolutely not. When you are able to toss the rescue line of God's saving grace to

the world around you, then and only then are you free to share the grace and comfort of God's rescue.

Seldom does a day go by that I, as a husband, father, grandfather and witness of Christ, don't think about the above illustration. It doesn't cause me to fear but rather it leads me to rely 100% on the grace and strength of God to equip me to serve in all my roles and vocations. The lessons I learned best from my father were the ones he intentionally taught to me. He sat me down at the dinner table with his check book and paycheck stub in hand. His checkbook showed me the deposit of his paycheck on one line and his tithe to God on the next. As an elder, he taught me integrity. Many times we were the only ones in the church but my father showed me that integrity is the willingness to follow Christ even when no one else was watching. He bore witness to his love for me with how he loved my mother. My father certainly wasn't perfect but he raised me to know God, His Word and to live every day for Him alone.

Once again, Happy Father's Day. Yes, you have a daunting task as a father. But what a privilege to know the influence you have on your family and the impression you make on others. I know you want to be the kind of father whose children feel secure, confident, loved and accepted; whose children save sex for marriage, and remain faithful to their spouse in marriage; whose children develop a reputation as men and women of integrity; who are hardworking; who say, "My dad keeps his promises;" who stand up to unhealthy peer pressure; who develop healthy friendships; who say no to drugs and alcohol and risky behavior; who repent of their sin; who are forgiving and patient with others and who enjoy a healthy sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. You want to be a father whose children have a hard time picking out a Father's Day card (not because they say too much but say too little).

We must be fathers who repent of our own sin and failures. But confessing this sin, we don't lower the bar but raise the child. We have a Heavenly Father who loves us unconditionally, has chosen us for the role of spiritual head of the family and equipped us for this task; who sent His very own Son to save us, forgive us, and empower us with His Gospel.

I don't know about you, but this Sunday's Gospel encourages me greatly as a father, grandfather and as a servant of the Lord. Jesus doesn't rebuke the disciples but rather rebukes the wind and the sea - and shows concern for our faith (our attachment) to Him. God is concerned about each of us having faith over fear - in the midst of any and all storms in life. And, in the midst of life, are we able to throw the rescue line of the Gospel to the world with confidence that our family will be together for eternity? Join me in that prayer. **A great Father's Day gift would be for each of your family members to confess belief in Jesus and confidence of their faith in Him alone.** (Certainly better than cologne or a new tie, right?) 3 John 4 says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

Have a great Father's Day - whether you are a father or a child - because it's a day to rejoice that you have not lowered the bar to the level of our culture but instead you are raised in the

saving grace of Christ. The Evangelization Team is printing weekly articles to encourage you in sharing the Gospel. The Gospel is relational. The Gospel is the foundation of the family's relationship with one another living life as witnesses now and for eternity. You are encouraged to purchase the new encouraging book by Rev. Mark Wood called, "Connected to Christ; Witnessing in Everyday Life." Faith (over fear) is our connection that frees us to share the Gospel. We would love to hear your witness about the task of serving as a father. What impression have you left on your family? Send your stories to this email: evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org We look forward to hearing from you. Be encouraged as you raise up your family in the grace of God.

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20