

“As a Father”

Psalm 103:13-19; Isaiah 63:15-16;
1 Cor 8:5-6; Romans 8:15-18; Luke 11:9-13

June 15, 2014
Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

Psalm 103:13-19

³As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. ¹⁴For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust. ¹⁵As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; ¹⁶for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. ¹⁷But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children, ¹⁸to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. ¹⁹The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

Isaiah 63:15-16

¹⁵Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and glorious habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The yearning of your heart and your compassion? They are withheld from me. ¹⁶For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name.

1 Corinthians 8:5-6

⁵Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—⁶yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Romans 8:15-18

⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. ¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

Luke 11:9-13

⁹“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³If you then, 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!”

I'm thankful for those words we started the call to worship with, from Psalm 103, verse 13: As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for his people.

God has compassion as a father for his children. There are a couple of things about that. One is the idea compassion. What is compassion? It's that idea of caring for another, thinking about how the other is experiencing life. Oftentimes, we think not only about how the other is experiencing life, but compassion generally comes to the fore when we see somebody else having struggles with life—pain or suffering. We often associate compassion with wanting to help out.

It makes me think back about 25 and a half years ago when I first held my first child in my arms and wondered what her life would be like. I think there was some father's compassion there. I wondered how I could be a father. I had never done that before. It was new territory. But the hope to be able to give her a good life, to help her through, to guide her on her way, that sense of compassion is something I think we all recognize or know. It's wonderful to hear that Psalm compare God to one who has that kind of compassion. As a father has compassion for his children, so God has compassion for his people.

It's a little bit overwhelming to think about that as a father, to think about having compassion for my children and seeing God as one who is like that. Am I then a representative of God as father? Was my father one who was supposed to be able to show me the things of God, the compassion of God? It's hard for me to even think about comparing myself with God because I think God is so much beyond. After all, we hear in 1st Corinthians that all things are from God, all things are for God. As much as I would like for the world to exist in that way for me, I know it's not true. Everything didn't come into existence because of me, nor is it all for me. I know that God is much beyond me.

When I begin to think about the idea that I might be a representative of God to my children, that my fathering might be thought of in relationship to how they see God as father, it's a little scary. To tell the truth, I don't think I have lived up to that through all these 25 ½ years. So I'm really thankful for what Jesus does.

In this passage from Luke, Jesus says, "You know how to give good things to your children." We all know how to give good things to our children, to one another, to the people we care for. Then he says, "Even you who are evil know how to do this." Now, I want to stop a minute on that because I don't think Jesus is really saying we're all evil all the time. There's another way to translate that. One of the ways that Greek word can be translated is *we all have serious faults*. We all possess serious faults. Well, that I recognize really well. We all possess serious faults. Even those of us who have serious faults know how to do good things for the ones we care for. It doesn't mean we always do it right. We have serious faults. It doesn't mean our fathers have always done it right for us. We have serious faults.

So what I'm thankful for here is that as the scripture begins to compare God to father, it often compares it to a specific, like the compassion of the father, the way we know how to give good gifts to our children. What it feels like is that it ends up flipping around. Instead of saying simply that God is like us as fathers, it encourages us as fathers or as people who care for others to be like God. In those moments when we know things are going right we might compare to God, but we know the fullness of that is with God.

So we begin to see God as the one who is the Good Father, and I can only hope that I can begin to live out some of who God is in my relationship with my children. We as parents or as caregivers can see what God does—the steadfast love, the righteousness, the compassion—and it's a call forward to us. Not to say that any human being is truly going to compare to God, but there is a way in which God invites us to show those characteristics to each other because we know that's who God is.

So as we say Happy Father's Day to one another, I guess we can say it to God as well, and we can truly be thankful for a God who has that compassion and loves us as children.

Let's pray:

Gracious God, we are happy to be able to say you are our Father, that this is one of the ways that we recognize the wonder of who you are—your compassion, your steadfast love, your righteousness. We know we as human fathers have not always lived up to who you are, and yet you invite us ever forward into being more like you, showing compassion, steadfast love, and righteousness. Lord, we are thankful for who you are, that you have given us your Son and the Holy Spirit to show us the way. You are a Good Father. Thank you. Through Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.