

Sermon

Sunday, June 16, 2019

Charleston, SC

8:00 am & 10:30 am Sermon ~ Ruth 4:9-17 & Matthew 7:7-14

Redeeming Fatherhood

The Rev. Al Zadig, Jr.

It's one of those letters you can never throw away. A letter from our now college bound son. When Christian was in the 2nd grade, he went for a week to summer camp, and this is what he wrote home:

I am very homesick. I do not want to go to summer camp next year. I am not in the same cabin as Mason.

Love, Christian. What is a father to do in such a situation? How as fathers do we provide for our children when we get such a letter? I've learned the question of provision never changes! As children grow up, circumstances change, but the need for a father's love and provision never changes. I remember some years ago I went to wake up my daughter as we were leaving on a family trip. I wake Wimberly up and to be honest, she was a bit less than charitable. *And so I said, Wimberly, it's only 8am, you seem a bit grumpy toward me.* Her reply was priceless: Dad, you were not nice to me in my dreams. How do we provide in those moments?

Well, just as we talked primarily to mothers on Mother's Day, today I want to talk to all fathers about the most important provision we can give our children. To our baptismal fathers of Barnwell, Riley, Smith, and Thornhill (it sounds like a law firm), I want to talk to you about the most important thing you can provide for Nathaniel, Rose, Bowie, and Timothy. Now, just because I'm preaching on fatherhood, doesn't mean everyone else can tune out. Why? Because all of us will be making vows to be spiritual fathers and mothers to these children when we say *We will* in just a moment. But I'm also speaking to single women to give you a vision of what to look for in a man! And to children, what I pray you will look for in your fathers.

So let me begin by backing up. This is what I call a good news sermon, good news because

I want to take away the pressure for dads = the pressure of trying to guess what children need and what's most important.

The Good News is that what we need to give our children is found in the perfect provision of God's provision for us. Today is not only Father's Day, but Trinity Sunday, when we celebrate God's provision of Himself as our Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I love the story about a little girl from India going to church for the first time in California. When she returns home, her father says, "What did you think of the service?" "Well," she said, "I don't understand why the West Coast isn't included too" "What do you mean?" said the father. "Well," she said, "I was confused when they prayed *In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Whole-East-Coast.*"

Trinity Sunday is about God's amazing provision of Himself in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's provision as the Father who created us. Think about what that means. God is our Eternal father. The one who knit you and me together from our mother's womb. The one who created earth. God the Father who paints every sunrise and sunset, and created every fish in the sea and every bird in the sky. God the Son. God provides his son Jesus, the only perfect image of the Father who became human. Jesus loved us so much, he took our sin upon Himself, died, and came back to life again so we might live forever, forgiven, and free! God the Holy Spirit. The provision of the Holy Spirit to be our fuel, our daily Source of power, and the one who helps us every day look, live, and love more like Jesus! God loves us so much! His Provision of Fatherhood, Jesus who saves us, and the Holy Spirit who sustains us proves His love for us! God didn't just create everything and leave. He created everything, but still tends

to us like a master gardener. He tends with love his own Garden – us. It's the most amazing love story of provision ever told!

But it's also the most sobering story ever told. In today's reading from Matthew 7, Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate, small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it." Narrow not because Jesus is hard to find, but narrow because only through Jesus can we live forever in heaven. There is no Plan B. As Jesus says in John, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father but by me." Luke echoes Jesus in Acts 4:12, "There is no other name under heaven given by which we can be saved." Our prayer book echoes Paul in Ephesians, that lifesaving provision in the first words of today's baptismal service. "There is one Body and one Spirit. There is One hope in God's call to us. One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism. One God and Father of all."

If we believe this and are in relationship with Jesus, we will live forever with Him in heaven. If we don't, then this life ends when our hearts stop beating. Therefore, if we really believe this eternal provision of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then Dads, we realize the most important provision we could give our children, is Faith in the one we and our children will prayerfully live with forever.

In fact, Dads – John, Rex, Park, and Timothy - you are not the primary fathers of your children. God is. He created them! You are God's stand-in fathers. In baseball terms, dads and moms, we are the managers, God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the Owner and General Manager! So the most important provision we can offer is to dedicate our lives to helping our children daily know their eternal Father. Your chief provision to your

children is God. Think about it this way, what will matter 100 years from now? The right pre-school, elementary, middle, high school, and college? Those decisions, as important as they are, pale in comparison to preparing our children for eternity. Aren't we more concerned about their forever life, than just the right four-year college? The children of our church, the children of our city, nation, and world need the love of the stand-in father to point to their eternal Father.

And this is why I love that great Old Testament dad Boaz. Boaz, from the book of Ruth. You remember the story. Ruth marries the son of Naomi, but both Ruth's husband and Father-in-Law die of unknown causes. So now it's just two widows, Naomi and Ruth. Being a woman back then was painfully difficult. Women were minors and therefore had as much authority as children in a court of law. Women couldn't own property or conduct business. But widowhood was even more difficult. With no support widows would most often become destitute. Some begged, but many more were forced into becoming ladies of the night.

Ruth and Naomi decide to go to Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem, hoping for family provision. They arrive in April, when farmers are cutting their first grain harvest. There a farmer named Boaz takes interest in Ruth. Why? Because of the way she provided for her elder mother-in-law Naomi. Boaz is fascinated with Ruth's integrity. Therefore, he provides for Ruth by making sure she is protected and has all she needed. Long story short, Boaz takes Ruth as his wife. But as much as Boaz provides for Ruth, his main provision was God. When Ruth and Boaz first meet in Chapter 2 Verse 12, Boaz looks at Ruth and says, "The Lord repay you for what you have done for Naomi, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" Boaz points to the provision of the Lord as their greatest need. And out of God's provision, something amazing happens. They would have a son, whom they would raise in the Lord. That son is named Obed. Obed would become the father of Jesse, Jesse would become the father of King David. And King David would be the great-great-great etc. Grandfather of Jesus Christ! Ruth and Boaz make God the chief provision for Obed, and through that

provision, these three become part of the eternal plan for the kingdom! Don't we want the same! Boaz, just an average father, knew the most important thing he could provide his family was God and therefore became part of the eternal plan for the Kingdom! So, how do we do this, how do we as Fathers "provide" God? Baptism is a beautiful and major step in providing our children with the seeds of faith. Baptism, where God adopts us as His children and provides these children with the power of the Holy Spirit! But baptism doesn't guarantee them having a relationship with Jesus. Baptism is the foundational prologue to the plan. Kind of like when they were born, you didn't just walk away and say, "You're on your own!" Likewise, when babies are reborn in Baptism, that's when the Father's provision kicks in! But sadly it's so easy for the tyranny of the urgent to take over. Over time it's easy to slip Dads into thinking my chief provision as father is to provide financially for my wife and children - the best house for them, the best schools for them. Those are good but are secondary provisions.

And this is where I take us back to Matthew. Jesus saying, "What Father, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? What Father, if His son asks for a fish, will give him a snake?" Our children, more than anything, want their daddies to give them Jesus. They have an inner craving for eternal security that they don't know how to articulate. That eternal security, Jesus, is their highest need. If we prioritize financial provision over Godly provision, as good as those things are, we're giving them stones and serpents.

Let me propose two simple ways to provide them with Bread and Fish. The first comes from the home, the second from the church. It begins at home. Dads and Moms, read the Bible to your children every single day in the morning. Over time, ask them how you can pray for them. What they say to you will amaze you. It's why as baptismal gifts we've given you my favorite Bible, the Children's Story Book Bible to use each day to remind them you are their stand-in father. But then, make Sunday worship as natural as breathing the air. That as they worship Sunday by Sunday they would discover the provision of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and through Sunday School having other elders pour into their lives to pave the way for a relationship with Jesus.

This doesn't mean, Dads, we have to be perfect or our homes perfect. My father got married so many times I lose count from time to time. Thank God the love and grace of God is so amazing. For even through my father's challenges, I always knew his chief provision, though he struggled, was still Jesus. What else will matter in 100 years? Maybe this is why John in the Bible would write, "I have no greater joy than to know my children are walking with Jesus."

I think of my friend and St. Michaelite Mark Fitzpatrick. Mark and Lynn have four grown daughters. Mark spent most of his time working for CBS in Manhattan, and then in investment management. Then they moved to Charleston and started coming to church here and, somewhere along the way, realized maybe they could have emphasized more the beauty and power of a rich relationship with Jesus. In the incredible spirit of Boaz, Mark, now at age of 71, and just last week, sends his children a legacy package. What was in it? He writes them a letter from his heart, and then sent them the story of how God provided in his own life. My friends, it's never too late to provide. It's never too early to begin.

Finally this morning, let me say how grateful I am today for Grandfathers: John Barnwell Senior, Peach Smith Junior, and John G. Thornhill. Thirty-five years ago, John and Peach provided for their sons John and Park by having them baptized here on the very same day, and here we are, more than 30 years later with their sons John and Park providing baptism for their sons. It's beautiful. Like Boaz-Obed-Jesse-David, Generational Provision! I'm also grateful for Timothy's dad, John G Thornhill, who with that great gravelly voice, taught John and Park the youngers in Sunday School. But now the work begins. Today is the prologue. Chapter one of the provision for these children begins when they get home later today, as you moms and dads begin to lead them in relationship with Jesus. Moms and Dads, we love you, we're behind you, as we help you provide their Highest need: Jesus. Let us pray.