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Date: June 16, 2013
Sermon Title: My Dad
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Father's Day Scripture Litany

Leader Honor your father (and your mother!) that your days may be long upon the earth. (*Exodus 20*)

Congregation Train up children in the way they should go; even when they are old they will not depart from it.
(*Proverbs 22:6*)

Leader Hear a father's instruction and be attentive that you may gain insight, for I give you good precepts. (*Proverbs 4:1*)

Congregation Listen to your father who gave you life.
(*Proverbs 23:22*)

Leader Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (*Colossians 3:21*)

Congregation Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (*Ephesians 6:4*)

Leader The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice ... The righteous father who walks in integrity — blessed are his children after him. (*Proverbs 23:24; 20:7*)

Together As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who love him. (*Psalms 103:13*)

When I was throwing all those verses together for our Father's Day litany, I had a terrific verse, but Alida wouldn't let me use it. This is from Proverbs 19:18. "Discipline your son, for there is hope, [but] do not set your heart on putting him to death." So there's a verse from 3,000 years ago that says, "Don't kill your kid." I guess that verse is a reminder that father/child relationships — heck, parent/child relationships — are fraught with tension.

From the perspective of adults, parenting is tough, being a father is tough, raising kids is tough. And from the perspective of kids, being a child is tough, whether you're an 18-year-old high school senior or an 8-year-old 3rd-grader. Being raised — parented, fathered and mothered — that's no piece of cake either.

When counseling families, I've often said that the purpose of a child is to test the limits, and the purpose of a parent is to limit the tests! In other words, the natural progression of things for parents and kids, the natural progression is to be in each other's faces and on each other's nerves, which is why the number-one thing fathers say to their kids is, "Wait till you have kids of your own!" In other words, wait till the natural progression of things progresses on your head, and you have to argue about the car, curfew, grades, parties, friends, summer jobs, and cleaning up. A friend once said that parents' best revenge is when their kids get to be parents!

I bet a lot of parental conversations begin with, "God knows, you'd better listen to me. God knows, this is harder on your mother and me than it is for you. God knows, you can do better than that. God knows, I know what I'm talking about. God knows, it was a lot tougher in my day. God knows ... I love you!" The thing is, when it comes to Father's Day, God actually does know!

This is why so much of Biblical theology is in personal family terms. The Church is the "Bride of Christ." Jesus is the "Groom." God is our "Heavenly Father." Jesus says we can call God "Abba," "Daddy," an intimate family term. All the motherly and fatherly qualities we admire and need are in God: God is nurturer, protector, creator, comforter. And we are repeatedly called "the children of God." God understands us as FAMILY. Our fatherly, motherly, parental God knows. God knows. The responsibility of parenting, the challenges of parenting, the heartache and joy. the pride and worry, the delight, the creative love of parenting ... God knows

Listen again to a couple of the verses we just used. In Proverbs it says, "The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice" AND "The righteous father who walks in integrity — blessed are his children. (Proverbs 23:24; 20:7) So, if

the kids are righteous, the dad is happy. And if the dad is a good guy, the kids are happy. It's a two-way street. Three ways when we bring God into it. Which Psalm 103 does, verse 13: "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion." Simply said, we are to mirror each other, God and fathers, fathers and mothers, parents and God. The best of God should show up in me from time to time. And the best of me, as a father, as a grandfather, the best of me is a little bit of God.

Let me close with a word about "My Dad" and his "God-likeness." My dad was my pastor growing up. He was my coach growing up. His work ethic is my work ethic. His pastoral style is my pastoral style. His passion for books or sports is my passion for books or sports. Let me make it simple for you. Whatever you like about me I stole from my dad. Whatever you don't like about me is my own stupid fault.

Above all, my dad stood for truth. Truth. So if I pick one bit of wisdom to pass on to dads and grads and all the rest of us, let's go with truth. Speak it. Seek it. Stand up for it, and withstand it.

Some of you have heard this story, but that's O.K. When I hit the very first home run of my life, I got back to the dugout, everybody's cheering and slapping me on the back, and my father calls me over and tells me, "The wind blew it over the fence." And he was right.

When I preached my very first sermon, at his church, he got out his red pen and crossed out half of it. "Too verbose," he said. And he was right.

My father believes in doing things right, and that takes truth telling and truth hearing. He didn't want me to get into bad habits as a hitter or as a preacher. It's also why he pushed me to think, which is why he pushed me to read, to listen, to see, to experience. Interestingly he didn't push his truth on me. But he darn well pushed me to find truth on my own.

Let me tell you about dinners in our house. The whole purpose of dinner was to argue. It didn't matter what any of us thought about anything. My dad took the opposite view and the battle began. When friends came over, they'd say to me later, "How can your dad believe those things he said?" And I'd tell them, "He doesn't. He just found out what you believed and took the opposite side, just to make you think!"

Jesus said about himself, "I am the TRUTH." And in our "Call to Worship," we quoted Jesus telling us to "worship in truth." So here's my Father's Day verse: "A wise son makes a glad father." (Proverbs 10:1) A wise son, a son who will turn the world upside down to discover truth and still stick to it.

That's the best Father's Day gift, that's the best worship, that's the best life.

Happy Father's Day to all!