

**“On Sowing Good Seed”**

**Mark 4:26-34**

**(Father’s Day – June 15, 2008)**

I don’t know if any of you saw an advertisement in a particular magazine for Father’s Day. It was an acrostic on the word Father. It reads, “F” is for your favorite occupation. (A man is pictured asleep in a chair) “A” is for the anniversaries you blew (mother is shown waiting in vain for father to come home for their anniversary dinner) “T” is for talk and your sparkling conversation (Dad is depicted as reading a newspaper while the children and wife are talking to him) “H” is for the helpful things that you do (Dad is shown poking a ladder through a window) “E” is for each time you were forgetful (this shows father leaving the pregnant mother standing at the front of the house while he dashes off to the hospital) “R” is for the recitals that you attended (father is shown as being literally drug to his child’s piano recital). The ad concludes by saying: He may not be a perfect father but he does deserve a perfect gift. Give him an Arrow shirt for Father’s Day.

Today we honor our fathers. And that’s good. Dads don’t get much respect nowadays. Bill Cosby has suggested that Father’s Day is about as exciting as Ground Hog Day. Among the many problems that he discloses about this observance is the issue of buying a present for Dad. Among the dumbest gifts that Cosby has received on this day of obligatory recognition is soap-on-a-rope – a remembrance which ranks slightly higher than the time he received a thousand yards of dental floss. There have been other thoughtful gifts, such as a sweater in June (it was on sale), the hedge cutters, weed trimmers and plumbing snakes. But according to Cosby, “Even General Patton would have lacked the courage to give his mother soap-on-a-rope.”

Or perhaps Erma Bombeck was right on when she wrote, “I remember very well how I got all my children, but for the life of me I can’t remember why. I think it was a 4-H project that got out of hand.”

**Garrison Keillor, on his “Writer’s Almanac” on National Public Radio reminds us that Father’s Day goes back to a Sunday morning in May of 1909, when a woman named Sonora Smart Dodd was sitting in church in Spokane, Washington, listening to a Mother’s Day sermon. She thought of her father who had raised her and her siblings after her mother died in childbirth, and she thought that her father should get recognition, too. So she asked the minister if he would deliver a sermon honoring fathers in her father’s birthday, which was coming up in June, which he did. And the tradition of Father’s Day caught on, though slowly. Mother’s Day became an official holiday in 1914; Father’s Day 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.**

**In our lesson from Mark, Jesus is describing the kingdom of God. “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.”**

**Now Jesus isn’t talking about fatherhood in this passage, but isn’t this the very first area in which we participate in the coming of God’s kingdom on earth? It is in the raising of children. Raising good children is like scattering seed upon the ground.**

**As author Ken Canfield notes, there are no guarantees in either raising kids or planting seed. A farmer can do all the right things and still lose a crop. So can parents. Some of you have learned the hard way that there are no guarantees. But generally, if we’ve done the best we can in planting and nurturing the seed which are our children, there will be a wonderful outcome.**

**Let’s begin here on this Father’s Day 2008. Fathers are important.**

**It doesn’t always work out, of course. And many young women today are doing a superb though difficult job of raising their young without a Dad, but, where possible, having Dad around can make a real difference.**

Some of you are familiar with William Raspberry, a syndicated writer with the Washington Post. In a column he made this analogy:

“Some years ago, South Africa’s game managers had to figure out what to do about the elephant herd at Kruger National Park. The herd was growing well beyond the ability of the park to sustain it. And so they decided to transport some of the herd to a nearby game park.

A dozen years later, however, several of the young male elephants (now teenagers) that had been transported to the game park began attacking the park’s herd of white rhinos, an endangered species. They used their trunks to throw sticks at the rhinos, chased them over long hours and great distance and stomped to death a tenth of the herd –all for no discernible reason.

Park managers decided they had no choice but to kill some of the worst juvenile offenders. They had killed five of them when someone came up with another bright idea. They brought in some of the mature male elephants still residing in the Kruger Park and hoped that the bigger, stronger males could bring the adolescents under control. To the delight of the park’s officials, it worked. The big bulls quickly established the natural hierarchy and reduced the violent behavior of the younger bulls.

“The new discipline, it turned out, was not just a matter of size intimidation,” says Raspberry. “The young bulls actually started following the Big Daddies around, yielding to their authority and learning from them proper elephant conduct. The assaults on the white rhinos ended abruptly.”

Raspberry’s point was that young males –whether they’re wild animals or human beings – need Dads. Those of us who grew up in families in which Dad was a positive influence will quickly agree. It doesn’t always work out like that, of course. There are some families in which Dad is absent and it can’t be helped. There are other families in which Dads do more harm than good, but fortunately that’s true in only a minority of families. Most Dads do the best they can. Fathers are important.

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**A conscientious father can do wonders in the lives of his children. A conscientious Dad can have a wonderful impact on the lives of his offspring.**

**For football fans there is a father who was rightfully celebrated several years ago. He is Archie Manning, former NFL quarterback, successful businessman, husband and father of three sons, two of whom, Peyton and Eli, are starting quarterbacks in the NFL. Even more important, all three Manning boys are men of character.**

**Archie claims that one of his greatest joys in life is his relationship with his sons. They describe him as loving and supportive. One reason that Archie Manning has been so deliberate in building a relationship with them is because he lost that chance with his own father. Manning was just nineteen when his father committed suicide. He determined that he would never waste an opportunity to show his sons how much he loved them. And he didn't. We celebrate sports heroes as Dads only because their example sometimes makes us want to do better.**

**In 1985 Tim Burke saw his boyhood dream come true the day he was signed to pitch for the Montreal Expos. After four years in the minors, he was finally given a chance to play in the big leagues. And he quickly proved to be worth his salt –setting a record for the most relief appearances by a rookie player.**

**Along the way, however, Tim and his wife, Christine, adopted four children with very special needs—two daughters from South Korea, a handicapped son from Guatemala, and another son from Vietnam. All of the children were born with very serious illnesses or defects. Neither Tim nor Christine were prepared for the tremendous demands such a family would bring. And with the grueling schedule of major league baseball, Tim was seldom around to help. So in 1993, only three months after signing a \$600,000 contract with the Cincinnati Reds, Tim Burke decided to retire from baseball.**

**When pressed by reporters to explain this decision, he simply said, “Baseball is going to do just fine without me. But I'm the only father my children have.”**

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**You don't have to be a sports hero to be a great Dad. All over the world are men seeking to model a Christian lifestyle.**

**Maybe you know the story of a hotel manager in Rwanda named Paul. In 1994, Hutu militants began a brutal assault against their Tutsi neighbors. More than a million people were murdered by the Hutu. In the midst of this slaughter over 1,200 desperate people took refuge in Paul's hotel. Daily, Paul faced down armed troops who wanted to invade the hotel and kill the occupants. Paul's courage and steadfastness in protecting the refugees in his hotel was so remarkable that they made a movie, "Hotel Rwanda," about this event.**

**Paul credits two heroes with giving him the courage he needed in that critical hour, his father and Nelson Mandela. His father had been well respected in the community. He was a wise man, and he always told the truth. When there were disputes in the community, the elders called on Paul's father to mediate. He was so honest that if one party in a dispute was lying, they often confessed their lie as soon as they saw Paul's father. His noble character made him influential in his community. Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, inspired Paul because he used non-violence and communication to bring about peace between enemies. Paul claims that the examples of his father and Nelson Mandela inspired him as he faced murderous mobs during the Hutu massacre.**

**A great Dad can have that kind of influence. Many Moms are just as courageous. When a conscientious man or woman plants a seed and takes the necessary steps to nurture that seed, miracles can occur.**

**Of course, the love of my parents is but a pale reflection of the love of God. God is the ultimate sower of good seed in our world. We wouldn't even know how to love, if God had not first loved us.**

**Some of you may remember a song from some time ago written by Sandy and Harry Chapin entitled, "Cat's in the Cradle." I offer the lyrics because it has meant a great deal to me over the years and it speaks of a father's responsibility. "My child arrived just the other day, He**  
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came to the world in the usual way/ But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay/ He learned to walk while I was away. And he was talking 'fore I knew it, and as he grew, / He'd say, "I'm gonna be like you, dad. You know I'm gonna be like you."

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon, Little boy blue and the man in the moon. "When you coming home, dad?" I don't know when/ But we'll get together then. You know we'll have a good time then."

My son turned ten just the other day. He said, "Thanks for the ball, dad, come on let's play. Can you teach me to throw?" I said, "Not today, I got a lot to do." He said, "That's ok." And he walked away, but his smile never dimmed, Said, "I'm gonna be like him, yeah. You know I'm gonna be like him."

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon, Little boy blue and the man in the moon. "When you coming home, dad?" "I don't know when, But we'll get together then. You know we'll have a good time then."

Well he came home from college just the other day, So much like a man I just had to say, 'Son, I'm proud of you. Can you sit for a while?" He shook his head, and he said with a smile, "What I'd really like, dad, is to borrow the car keys. See you later. Can I have them please?"

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon, Little boy blue and the man in the moon. "When you coming home, son?" "I don't know when, But we'll get together then, dad, You know we'll have a good time then."

I have long since retired and my son is moved away. I called him up just the other day. I said, "I'd like to see you if you don't mind." He said, "I'd love to, dad, if I could find the time. You see, my new job's a hassle, and the kid's got the flu, But it's sure nice talking to you." And as I hung up the phone, it occurred to me, He'd grown up just like me. My boy was just like me.

**And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon, Little boy blue and the man in the moon.  
"When you coming home, son?" "I don't know when, But we'll get together then, dad. You  
know we'll have a good time then."**

**When are we going to learn that what we do as parents speaks louder than what we say. It  
is easier to provide a house than it is to provide a home. It is easier to give dollars than it is to  
give time. It is easier to write a check than to share love. It is easier to give fun than it is to  
give wisdom. It is easier to be a provider than it is to be a good leader. It is easier to push our  
children through the door of the church rather than lead them into the church. It is easier to be  
the bread winner, then to teach our children about the bread of life.**

**In the end there is only one way we can gain status as father. This is by remembering that  
When Jesus prayed he used the words, "Our Father." You are a true father in the spiritual  
sense only if you have the same relationship with your children as our heavenly father has  
shown toward us. May we as fathers recommit ourselves to that challenge on this special day.  
Amen.**