

Text: Luke 11.1  
St Stephen's

June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009  
Father's Day: Sun AM

## The Father Behind the Fathers

My **concussion**: the Drs gave me a follow-up ct scan last week said everything looks good and cleared me to ride my bike again.

**Ft Worth** this week for launching convention of the new Province. 100,000 people, 700 parishes, 20 Dioceses. Bp Duncan will be consecrated ArchBp Weds PM.

**Vacation** after that: Scotland for a couple of weeks

A great week for Summer Cel.  
The focus was on the Lord's Prayer

**Five themes:**

### 1) Our Father Listens to Us

*"Pray then like this: "Our Father..."*

Matthew 6:9

Over the first months of their years with Jesus, his disciples spent a lot of time **watching him**. One of the things they noticed was that **he prayed** a lot. And when he prayed it seemed different, like he was talking to a God who listened to him, who cared for him, and who was **just right there for him**. So they asked him to teach them to pray like that, and he did. He said, *'pray like this, Our Father...'*

That was a stunning set of words. They were expecting a **different kind of phrase**. 'Almighty and Majestic God of our Fathers...', or 'you who dwell in unapproachable holiness', or 'thou whose name we dare not to speak', or something like that.

But **'father...'**? They had never heard anyone talk to God like that. Not just talk to him. And neither had the rest of the world. Do you know **Islam** has 99 names for God. 'Father' is not on that list. But it is on

Jesus' lips, and he brings us to that kind of God. You have a real Father, who is there for you, who cares about you, who listens to you.

**Us Dad's** these days are not well known for being there. Dad's are more famous for being **disconnected and distant**, preoccupied or exhausted - or maybe for not being there at all. It is hard to **be one of God's dads** when you live in **a culture** that lays all ambitions and aspirations on the altar of career success. Not much left over when that happens.

President **Obama** this week shared some personal comments about what it was like to grow up in **a house without a dad...**

*President Obama's father was a Kenyan goatherder-turned-intellectual who clawed his way to scholarships and Harvard, he left a family behind to get his schooling in the United States. He started another family here, then left his second wife and 2-year-old Barack Jr. to return to Africa with another woman.*

*His promise flamed out in Africa after stints working for an oil company and the government; he fell into drink and died in a car crash when his son was 21, a student at Columbia University.*

***"I don't want to be the kind of father I had,"** the president is quoted as telling a friend.*

Quite a statement. And a lot of us would like to be a **different kind of dad**, too. You can be, because **there is a Father for the fathers**. No matter what the difficulty of your past or your present – there is a Father who is closer than the air you breath, just a prayer away, who is there for you, whose ears are open, whose heart is turned in your direction, who can heal and redeem and restore – and **make you a different kind of dad, one of God's dads**.

**'Our Father'**, Jesus taught us...

## **2) Our Father Rules Us**

*"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*

## Matthew 6:10

This is at the heart of the prayer of Jesus, and **something very important happens here**. We pray for his Kingdom. His Kingdom is not the coming of heaven, though it will take care of that in due time. **His Kingdom** is the place where **his will is done**, and we are praying for that here and now. All around us. Inside us. **Everywhere**. 'Thy will be done.'

Of course – and don't miss this – that means we are **giving up our will**. Giving up **our kingdom**. Our plans and dreams and visions. Our control.

When a dad does this it makes him a **different kind of man**. He's not so driven. Not so full of himself. He is given an extra set of eyes and an extra set of ears. He can **see** what is happening, but he can **see beyond** what is happening. He can **hear** what is said, but he **hears more** too. He can see **what the Father is doing**, hear **what the Father is saying**. Once that begins to happen, you begin to bring the kind of leadership to a marriage or home or workplace or community that people can depend on and trust. You are beginning to be one of **God's Dads**, one of the **Father's fathers**.

### 3) Our Father Provides for Us

*"Give us this day our daily bread,"*

Matthew 6:11

I want to tell you about one of **my heroes**. He was **born** in England in 1832 and lived for 73 years. He was **converted** to Christ at the age of 17, and almost immediately sensed a call to take the gospel to the people of China.

A small man of frail health and unimpressive in appearance, he seemed a poor candidate to face the **hardships** of international travel and cross cultural adjustments required by life in the 1800's. But he was to **lead one of the most remarkable missionary movements** of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His name was **Hudson Taylor**, and by the time of his death in

the early 1900's, over 800 missionaries and well over a thousand workers had joined him in bringing the good news of God's love to the people of China. Over 100,000 Chinese had converted to faith in Christ, in spite of severe opposition and the martyrdom of many leaders. His work laid the foundation of the current underground church in China which has flourished in spite of severe oppression under decades of communist rule.

When **Hudson Taylor** first started to think about going to China, he could see that he faced a **huge problem**. Round trip passage to China took over **6 months** by ship. If you sent a letter from China to England asking for help, you wouldn't hear back for half a year. But he noted that Jesus told us to **pray** wherever we were for our **daily needs**. Taylor reasoned that God could hear him and answer just as well in China as he could in England...

So he decided to try **an experiment** while he was in medical school in England. He decided **not to ask anyone for financial help except God alone**. One summer he started on one side of England with nothing but a Bible and a one pound note. He preached and prayed his way across the country, **never asking anyone for financial help... except his Father in prayer**. He found **God supplied** every need, every day. The Father-faith born out of that experience became the operational strategy for his great ministry. His **motto** became, *'God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply.'* That sentence has been on my wall for 30 years of ministry. I have found it to be true, without exception.

Again and again Hudson Taylor would say, **"You have a real Father"**. And we do. Taylor himself was **one of God's dads, one of the Father's fathers**.

#### **4) Our Father Forgives Us**

*"and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."*

Matthew 6:12

I heard a comment from a child development expert recently who said,

*'It is unlikely that any child will ever reach adulthood healthy and whole unless some older person in his life **demonstrates irrational and consistent love** toward them.'*

One of the most beloved stories in the bible is the story Jesus told about the **prodigal son**, who just couldn't take his home anymore. Alienated from his dad, despising what he had, he demanded his inheritance and took off. He blew it all and ended up in a pig sty, quite a come down for a kosher Jewish boy, before he came to his senses and started home.

I've learned over the years that this was not as much a story about the son as it is **about the dad**. This dad is **one of God's dads**. It broke his heart when his boy took off, but he **let him go**. Do you remember that? He gave him his inheritance and let him go. Why? Because he gave up on his boy? Because he wrote him off? He might have done that, as some of Moms and Dads have felt compelled to do in very painful circumstances. But not this dad. Because he knew that **there was a Dad behind the dad, a Father behind this Father**.

He knew that though his son left his own home and had gone out **beyond his reach**, his **father's home** was far **larger**, and his **Father's reach** was far **greater**.

And so he **sat on his porch** every night and looked down that road that his son walked months before, and he **prayed**. I know that is what he did with his evenings. He prayed his Father's hand upon his boy, his Father's forgiveness on his boy, his Father's help for his boy. And when the day came that he saw his son come back over that hill, he rolled up his robe and ran to him. His son couldn't even get the words of repentance out of his mouth before the party was on!

I have learned over the years that one of the most important, most powerful, most transforming things a Dad can do is to **bring Christ's forgiveness into his family**, again and again - this wild, irrational, forgiving love to sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, moms and dads. That one of the things God's dads do.

## 5) Our Father Protects Us

*"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."*

Matthew 6:13

I saw **my own Dad** Friday night... Bec and I drove to Cleveland and back for a wonderful four hour dinner with Mom and Dad. Dad's 91 now. It was our first visit with them for months, and the first since my concussion. Mom and Dad have had some medical fears of their own during these months, and we've had some other family issues that have been real and frightening for us all. It is **given to Dads to protect their kids**, and God's dads take this seriously, ever more seriously in a world that is increasingly filled with real and present dangers.

You learn that as hard as you work to protect your kids **you can only reach so far**. Soon enough you learn that your children grow in their **own ways**, and have to walk their **own journey**, live through their **own failures**, and face their **own set of challenges**. I **made** my Mom and Dad learn that when I was in my 20's, and Becca and I are learning it as well. You learn that **your hand can reach only so far**.

When that comes upon you, you find yourself there **alongside the Prodigal's dad**. **Thankful** that there is a Father behind the fathers, a Dad behind the dads. Knowing and praying that his arm can reach where yours cannot.

**My own dad reminded me of that** in our visit. Near the end of our conversation, when I had briefed him on some of the challenges our kids were facing – and when I had told him that Bec and I were going to be in Scotland for the first 3 weeks of July on vacation, he (my 91 year old dad) said something important to us –

*"Don't worry, I'll have it all straightened out before you get back, just leave it to me. I have my own special ways, just leave it to me."*

He meant the words to be a lighthearted comfort, and no doubt a recollection of the days past when he had done this so many times for me. It was that, and it was something far more.

Once again, I heard, as I have from time to time in my conversations with my aging dad, **a voice behind his voice**, the Father behind the fathers, the Dad behind the dads. And the voice of my greater Father seemed to be saying this,

*'Don't worry; your children are my sheep. My love for them is far greater than your own. My ways are not like yours, but you can trust them to me. You can release them to me. I can reach where you can not, I can change what you can not, I will be there when you can not. Just leave them to me.'*

We have a Father who is that real, and you can count on him.

That's why Jesus taught his followers to pray, *'Our Father...'*