

Ephesians 5:25-27, 6:4 'A Father's Love'

God created human beings to live in relationships. Specifically God created us to live in families. After God made man God said, ***"It is not good that man should be alone...I will make a helper fit for him."*** So from Adam's rib God made a woman and brought her to the man and Adam said, ***"Here at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called 'woman' because she was taken out of man."*** Holy Scripture interprets this incident with these words, ***"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh."*** Jesus verified the importance of marriage with this verse in the New Testament, ***"What God has joined together let no man separate."*** God created human beings to live in relationships. And God established marriage as the foundation of all human interactions and society. We begin life as children learning through our parents the core values of God, family, love, responsibility, faith, and ethics. As children our parents are the focus of our lives. When we marry we transfer our focus so that our primary relationship is with our spouse. This is by God's design as He made clear with these words, ***"Therefore a man leaves his father and mother to be joined with his wife and the two become one flesh."*** God created us to live in relationships; beginning with parents, transferring to our husband or wife, shared with children, and expanding the circle to our blood relatives, community, city and nation, and all people. God has called us into the family of the faith to live within the church the fellowship of believers in the family of God.

Today is Fathers' Day. Both fathers and mothers play vitally important roles in the family structure. This morning I want to address the important role of fathers by God's design. A recent article in the Lutheran Witness discusses how the stability of the family is lost when the father/husband is absent from the home. Where the father is absent children are missing half of the life example they need to develop into mature and healthy individuals. In the absence of a father a child will often seek out another father figure so substitute that role. However, a child may not always choose a good example. Programs like 'Big Brothers' seek to fill that need. Sometimes uncles or older brothers or even grandpas provide examples, all of which is commendable, but there is really no substitute for one's own father who loves his wife and takes care of his children and fulfills his God-given purpose in God's design.

God places a very high responsibility upon men to fulfill their role as both husbands and fathers. So highly does God value this role that he describes His relationship with Jesus as a Father/Son relationship. Jesus taught us to address God in prayer as '***Our Father who art in heaven.***' In the order of Creation God gave Eve to Adam as his helpmate. They would live out their lives together as 'one flesh' which no man should separate. This is God's order for marriage and family, and God gave husbands and fathers responsibility to maintain this order for their marriage and families.

Ephesians 5 tells us that men are to fulfill their marriage by loving their wives as Christ loved the church. How much did God love the church? God so loved his church that He sent Jesus, His own Son, to give up His life on the cross to save the church from sin and destruction. Greater love has no man than this, that a man give

up his life for his friends. This is the love a husband is prepared to give for his wife, who is one flesh with him. In response to this commitment of love the wife is committed to both love and respect her husband, recognizing his responsibility as the spiritual head of the family and she teaches their children to respect their father for his accountability, concern, and love for them all.

Fathers, God has given you the role of providing spiritual leadership for your families. Statistics illustrate that children follow their father's example in how they attend church as adults. Various studies consistently verify that whether or not a young man or woman continue to worship and take part in the church follows the example of their fathers much more so than their mothers. In Deuteronomy 6 God instructs fathers to teach God's word diligently to their children and talk of God's precepts when they sit in their house and walk by the way and when they go to bed and when they get up. Children are watching their father's example as formulate values and priorities by which they will live their own lives. It is good that fathers take the lead in spiritual leadership by leading the prayers before the meal, reading family devotions and teach their children the basic doctrines of the faith with Bible lessons and Luther's Small Catechism.

The heavenly Father loves us deeply; so much does He love us that He sent His Son to save us by means of His cross. His love is strong and intense, as it is also just and loving. God expedited His Fatherly love, not by overlooking sin and dismissing our trespasses as non-consequential but by clearly stating that there are consequences for sin. God demonstrated His Fatherly love, not by ignoring our sin, but by holding us accountable for what we have done and then, declaring that He Himself will pay the price for our

by offering Himself as the sacrifice which earns our redemption. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son; He gave him to the cross. It is that strong, accountable, and sacrificial love that fathers are called by God to exemplify for their children. Firm justice for wrong-doing. Self-sacrifice in forgiveness. This is the wisdom of our heavenly Father's love toward us. This is the wisdom fathers teach their children.

Fathers, it is your high and God ordained privilege to be examples of the heavenly Father to your children and families. Rejoice in this privilege to declare God's great love with your families. Love your wife. Love your children. Love you neighbor. Love God. Love his Word. Speak the truth with love. Be strong and courageous to never compromise God's holy will. By this we walk with God and abide in his truth and share God's wise and discerning love to the great blessing of our families and all mankind. Amen.