

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland. Father's Day, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, June 17, 2018.**

To all the fathers here this morning, happy Father's Day. One of your gifts today is a sermon designed with you in mind. Moms too, but with special consideration for dads.

Why focus on dads today? Two reasons: first, in the secular calendar this is your appointed day, and we should honor it; and second, the lessons appointed for today in the church calendar seem to have you in mind. Coincidence? I don't know. Opportunity? Of course. So, here goes.

We begin with today's Collect. It is a prayer for the Church, identified as God's household. We're going to broaden the term "household" to include our own households and the role of parents in those households.

I think we can agree that the "household," as an institution, deserves our support. The household is people. It is family. It has members. It can be a "nuclear" family with two parents and children, or it can be an extended, expanded, blended family. Whatever its size or composition, the "household" has an identity, and its members have roles, and the manner in which these roles are executed determines to a significant degree the health, vitality and durability of the household. The household is a building block for a community and nation, as well as a refuge for the members of the household. In short, "households" are well worth our attention and our prayers.

Our first lesson today is from the Prophet Ezekiel (**Ezekiel 17:22-24**). Ezekiel lived six centuries before Jesus, including time in Exile. He would return to Israel following a prolonged absence. He and others knew first-hand the value of a household during this challenging time. For those in Exile, the whole Hebrew community was a household that survived the Exile because of strong leadership. It is not surprising that strong leadership was the subject of Ezekiel's teaching. In today's lesson, he speaks of God planting leadership. "On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live."

"A noble cedar." What a great description of a strong and loving God. And what an accurate definition of a strong and loving parent. Isn't the aspiration of fathers

and mothers everywhere to provide for family a safe and stimulating environment, in which children have an opportunity to bear fruit and to be strong parents themselves? “A noble cedar.” Ask a father what kind of tree he would like to be, and the father might well respond, “I would like to be for my household a noble cedar.” And, just as the Lord spoke in this morning’s lesson, fathers boldly proclaim, “I will accomplish it.”

This whole notion of preparing children for adulthood is captured in this morning’s gospel (**Mark 4:26-34**). Planting seeds and harvesting grain. Isn’t that what households are about? We want for our children the opportunity to “become the greatest of all shrubs and put forth branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” And, we want this opportunity not only for our children, but first for ourselves as parents.

One of the disappointments that dads and moms can experience is that they haven’t done as good a job of planting and harvesting as they had hoped. They question whether their bold proclamation “I will accomplish it” has been fulfilled. Fortunately, though, this disappointment is often offset by a great surprise, namely that, despite the shortcomings of parents, children can still dream big and achieve big.

Household outcomes are indeed tough to predict. This is no excuse, however, for not accepting the responsibility of planting and harvesting. So, on this Father’s Day, we pray for parents to keep their heads high, to keep trying to be the greatest of all shrubs and putting forth branches so that our children can make nests in our shade, and to realize that healthy children need sunlight as well as shade. Providing too much shade is a risk, as is providing too little.

Now we come to St. Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians (**2 Corinthians 5:6-17**). Paul is all over the map in this passage. And that might be because his audience is all over the map. These early Christian communities had serious challenges. Fortunately, many of these communities not only survived, but flourished.

For Paul, the reason for this growth had to do, not with Paul, but with the Risen Lord. Remember the last verse of this morning’s passage: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

Isn't this attitude what we want to pass along to our children? When they are disappointed, we remind them that today is a new day. Whatever happened yesterday doesn't have to happen today. And, when they are ecstatic, we remind them not to rest on their laurels. Whatever happened yesterday doesn't have to happen today. This message of a "new day" is one of the great responsibilities of dads and moms.

This lesson can be taught and learned in many ways, but, for you and me, one of the most effective methods is to share the Good News. Not the evening news, but the Good News of a loving God. All the major religions have a version of this Good News. The Christian version is specific. It has to do with the birth, life, death and resurrection of a first century carpenter named Jesus.

This particular Good News is filled with all the challenges that young people face, but also with the victory that young people crave. What a shame not to expose children to this Good News. They will make up their minds about how to process what we share with them. Our job as parents is not to make up their minds for them – which isn't going to happen anyway - but to model in our lives what a benefit this Good News can be.

So, dads and moms, part of being a noble cedar, part of planting and harvesting, is to share what is really meaningful to you. Kids have their favorite teachers, some of whom are at school. But their really favorite teachers are at home. The household. That's where really memorable stuff happens.

All kinds of stuff. Our job as parents is to champion the Good Stuff, including those things that are really meaningful to us. I think this is what verse four of today's Psalm is about (**Psalm 92:1-4, 11-14**): "For you have made me glad by your acts, O Lord; and I shout for joy because of the works of your hands."

Something for dads and moms to think about on this special day: "What do you shout for joy about? And if this exercise stumps you, ask your kids. And, if this exercise stumps them, maybe it's time for a family chat, which in itself is part of the Good Stuff.

Happy Household Day. Amen.

