

A Few Words for Father's Day  
Deuteronomy 3:23-4:1

One night a wife found her husband standing over their newborn baby's crib. Silently she watched him. As he stood looking down at the sleeping infant, she saw on his face a mixture of emotions: disbelief, doubt, delight, amazement, enchantment, skepticism. He would stand back, shake his head and say, "Amazing," while smiling from ear to ear.

Touched by his unusual display and the deep emotions it aroused, her eyes glistened as she slipped her arms around him. "A penny for your thoughts," she whispered in his ear.

"Isn't it amazing!" he replied. "When you take the time and really look close, how can anyone make a crib like that for only

\$45.99?"

Men and women are different from each other, aren't they? Two women at a party find they are dressed alike, and they're mortified. Two men are dressed alike and they're relieved: it means that against all odds they just might be dressed appropriately.

And men have it so good in so many ways. We don't need an entourage to go to the rest room at a party. Phone calls last only thirty seconds or so. A five-day holiday trip only requires one suitcase. We don't have to listen to Michael Bolton or Kenny G. And we never, never, ever, worry about cellulite, and truth be told don't really know what it is.

But then Father's Day rolls around, and sometimes we wonder if we have it so good after all. We worry about our role as fathers, and even wonder if we're so important after all, we who sometimes find the practical matter of the cost of a crib intruding on tender moments spent with a brand-new child.

Most commercials cast fathers as the family idiot, who can't figure out how to take care of the kids alone, how to run a load of laundry or clean the bathroom without specific instructions from mom. Or at the very least, we are emotionally clueless.

One little boy, when asked to explain about Father's Day, said, "It's just like Mother's Day, only you don't spend as much on the present."

Mother's Day gifts speak of family, intimacy, relationships, love, beauty. Perfume and flowers are often the gifts of choice. Father's Day gifts are often weapons, so we can go out and do battle; golf clubs or neckties come to mind, or the gifts speak of staying home and fixing up the castle: weedwackers and power screwdrivers and such. What we do seems more important than who we are.

So, what is there to say today, here in church, in a worship service, about Father's Day? Our Scripture has some words that might work. The speaker is Moses, who in his own way was a father figure to the people of Israel. He addresses the people just as they are about to enter into the Promised Land. He has led them to the border, but he himself will not enter. He will die. And today he talks to them about this.

It was Moses who had inspired and led the Children of Israel in their journey from bondage in Egypt now to the very border of the long-dreamed of Promised Land. And we can understand that Moses, as a father, wanted to travel with the children across the River Jordan into their new land.

But it was not to be. He begs God, let me cross over and see this great land. But God says: enough. You will not cross over. But notice what Moses is doing: he's accepting responsibility for his own actions. God is angry at the people, but He's also angry at Moses for not having been a better leader. And Moses accepts the rebuke.

And that's not such a bad trait for a father to have: the integrity to admit he is wrong, that he has fallen short. When parents

teach kids how to make excuses, or help them out of scrape after scrape, they don't do their kids any favors. Stand up. Take responsibility. Not such a bad way to be a father.

Now, at this point, it is not necessary for parents to tell their kids every little bad thing they did when they were young. When our kids want to stay out late, we naturally say "no," Why? Because we remember what we did when we were that age. But our kids don't need to know that. They just need to know that doing wrong has consequences.

And our job is to enforce these limits. Theirs is to test them. And that's where the fun begins. . .but back to Moses.

In the midst of consequences, God shows mercy. Moses was

able to climb up a high mountain and see across the river, and see where the children of Israel would be going. In other words, he would see that all his hard work would pay off. His work would bring blessing to the next generation.

That's the job of parenting also, isn't it? Unlike Moses we don't always get to know how our parenting will bring blessing, but we know it's important just the same.

Well, back to our Scripture. Moses implores the people to follow the commandments. "Follow them so that you may live." That's another part of being a father, isn't it? Passing on the commandments, the rules and mores by which we should live.

And fathers, be careful what commandments, what truth by

which to live, you teach and show to your children. A father who is cruel to his wife is teaching the kids, that's how to be. A father who is always at work, never at home, is teaching that this is correct behavior. A father and mother, if they separate, who then turn the children into bargaining chips, or use the child to express anger at the other, is teaching that this is acceptable behavior.

But on the other hand, a father who helps around the house, who takes kids to movies and goes hiking and fishing and goes to soccer games, is teaching different, and good commandments.

A father who is faithful in attending worship, and lives a masculine, robust, yet Christ-centered life, gives his children a

wonderful gift indeed.

So, our Scripture has yielded some good words for Father's Day. Integrity. Consequences. Yet, also mercy. Teaching the Commandments.

But maybe the best word for Father's Day in our Scripture this morning is: encouragement.

Think who Moses has been. Military leader. Political leader. Moral leader (after all, it was to him the Ten Commandments were given.) And now, as Moses prepares to leave the scene, as all he has done is now to be carried by the next generation, God tells Moses that Joshua will be the next leader, to fulfill what Moses has begun. And God asks Moses: encourage Joshua,

and strengthen him. The implication is, the strength comes through encouragement. Encouragement: in the Hebrew and in English: "to give courage to."

Fathers, you need to encourage your kids, even when you think they no longer listen. Now, when children are young, they think we can do no wrong. But when they are teens, they think we can do no right. Our music is funny, our clothes are funny, and our only revenge is to take a picture of our kids and hold it for blackmail later when they have kids.

My son still laughs at my wedding picture and my hair style. And just think, he has never seen that famous photo with my hair in what you might call a Prince Valiant style. Cut above my eyes in a strait line, and cascading down to my shoulders.

But even if our kids think we are goofy, our kids still look to us to be their beacon of hope in the darkness and their strong rock when they feel as if they are stuck in quicksand.

Encouragement. Not just a pep talk, but really to give courage to. To give courage to keep trying when the grades are low. To keep hoping when the boy friend dumps her. To know you are valued when you have just gotten your license and have driven the car off the road because you braked too hard to avoid a possum.

So, here's where Father's Day finds us. Reading about Moses, who was a true father to his people. And he knew he could not control the future, but he could influence it. And he set about it by: showing integrity. Accepting consequences. Receiving mercy.

Teaching commandments. And maybe most importantly, encouraging the next generation.

And fathers, let me encourage you as well. To know that you are of immense value, not just because you mow the lawn or fix the faucet. Not just because you bring home a paycheck. But because you are a father. And as with Moses, you do not have the ability to control the future, but you certainly have the ability to influence the future, simply because you are a father.

Fatherhood. A tremendous responsibility. A tremendous opportunity. Fathers, keep at it. You're perhaps much more important than you have ever imagined. As your kids look to you for integrity, and commandments, and courage. Amen.