

"Acceptance"

Luke 7:36-8:3

June 17, 2007

I read that Garrison Keillor, spoke about Father's Day going back "to a Sunday morning in May of 1909, when a woman in Spokane, Washington was listening to a Mother's Day sermon and thought of her father who had raised her and her siblings after her mother died. She thought that fathers should get recognition, too. So she made some initial moves that would lead to our celebration of Father's Day. What I found interesting were some of the fact that Keillor added about both Mother's Day and Father's Day. Apparently a Mother's Day recognition had been in place but only became an official holiday in 1914; Father's Day, with it's beginning following the 1909 request did not become official until 1972. Keillor added that 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. What do you think it all means?

Thanks to Allan and Travis for sharing on this Father's Day. I do think that it is an incredible responsibility to be a Father and one that all men should take very seriously as they live as role models, whether it is for their own children or for others who look up to them. I am thankful that these two men have been willing to consider what it means for them 'to be a father' and I would invite all of us to take some time to think about what it means and how we most appropriately live as fathers. I do think that it is appropriate for all of us no matter if we are fathers or not - even if we are of the 'male gender' or not. We are the children of a heavenly Father who has called us to be shaped by this relationship - our lives modeled on His role model. So what does it mean to be a Father?

The scriptures before us again today are absolutely incredible. I always find myself marveling at the fact that I can read these stories so many times and yet not get it. Sure, I think that we understand in part what the story is trying to convey - but we really don't 'get it' in terms of the appropriate application to our lives.

A Pharisee is quick to judge the woman who sneaks up behind Jesus and begins to bath his feet with her tears. How could such a sinful woman dare to do it and even worse, how could Jesus allow it. Nathan, the prophet, tells King David a story that he is astounded by. Anyone who would do such a thing - any rich man who would take the only lamb of a poor neighbor and make it the evening meal for his rich guests deserved to die. It is a different thing when suddenly you hear the words, "You are the man!"

Of course we are quick to chant the words of Confession at the beginning of our worship service. In a general way, we are willing to admit that we are sinful beings [although we are not as bad as so many others]. It is just so very easy to see the failings of other because they are such blatant failures. We may not always get everything right but at least we try. We are not like those real sinners!

I find myself thinking about the story of 'the cookie thief.' A woman at the airport waiting to catch her flight bought herself a bag of cookies and then found a chair in the airport lounge where she could wait and read her book. As she read she noticed the man beside her helping himself to a cookie in the bag on the chair between them. Not wanting to make a scene, she read on, ate cookies, and watched the clock. But the daring "cookie thief" kept on eating the cookies and she became more and more irritated with that cookie thief. She wanted to move the cookies to her other side but she couldn't bring herself to do it. With each cookie she took, he took one too. When only one was left, she wondered what he would do. Then with a smile on his face and a nervous laugh, he took the last cookie and broke it in half. He offered her half, and he ate the other. She snatched it from him and thought, "Oh brother, this guy has some nerve, and he's also so rude, why, he didn't even show any gratitude!" She sighed with relief when her flight was called. She gathered her belongings and headed for the gate, refusing to look at the ungrateful "thief." She boarded the plane and sank in her seat, reached in her bag to get a book to read and forget about the incident. Next to her book was her bag—of cookies.

Don't you just hate those horrible cookie thieves? And then we hear Nathan turn to David and to say, "You are the man!"

I found myself really drawn in by the speech given by one of the graduating seniors at the graduation I attended recently in Rapid City. The young man giving the speech addressed the class and said that they were the class of 2007 and began to describe who they were. I was initially stunned as he used one descriptive word after the next - words that, too often, we all hear or even use to describe the young people of today. He said things like, "we are inconsiderate, rude, and untrustworthy. We do not know the value of a dollar and think only of ourselves. We are unthinking, uncaring, selfish and stupid. The list went on for what seemed to be far too long before I finally got the point as he began to talk about what that class of 2007 would become. I realized how often we dismiss and belittle people who will indeed become the leaders of our communities and nation - those very people who will be the doctors and nurses caring for you - the designers and creators who will shape our world - the lawyers, policemen and women, the politicians and bankers who will watch over critical issues, the mothers and fathers who will raise the next generation.

How very easy it seems to have been for the Pharisee to judge the sinful woman. How could Jesus even allow her to touch him. How very easy it is for us to turn up our noses at those who do not live up to our expectations. I hear the prophet Nathan saying, "You are the man!"

But, as I hear the words that point me to my own failings, what stands out most boldly in today's Gospel is the action of Jesus. Jesus, who sits there, not condemning, but welcoming, accepting, loving. And what is absolutely incredible is that we can see that same action repeated over and over through the Bible. Look at many of the most revered characters in the Bible. When King David deliberately put Bathsheba's husband Uriah in the battles front lines so he would be killed in action and so that David could marry Bathsheba - when David did that, why didn't God totally disown David? When the Apostle Paul, then Saul, was putting Christian to death, why didn't God send lightening to strike him down? When Peter denied knowing Jesus, why didn't Jesus turn His back on Peter forever? The list of God's followers who failed could go on and on - always with the same end result, God accepts and forgives. That is what our heavenly Father does. Is that what it means for us to be fathers - for all of us to walk in the footsteps of our heavenly Father?

AMEN