

**St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Various

***“A Father’s True Love”***

Today is Father’s Day, and I am very thankful to tell you that I was blessed to have a wonderful father – who loved me and was never afraid to tell me that and that he was proud of me and my three sisters – but he was also stern and meted out punishment when deserved. It is sad to say that it was 41 years ago in 1976 that he went home to be with the Lord. That night or really early morning as we gathered at my mother’s house, someone who was about to become a very important man in my life, came over to me, Marilyn’s dad, Eric, who by the way went home to be with the Lord in 2005, came over to me, grabbed my hand and said ‘I can never replace your Dad, but just know that I will always be here if you need me.’ He was true to that promise. He also was a godly man who loved the Lord and his family. Were they perfect? No - and the truth is - none of us are.

Sadly there are many people who have had bad experiences as they grew up – with no real relationship with their father – or a painful one with bad memories. You know, many years ago my two kids John Eric and Theresa gave me a little plaque with a picture of the three of us – with the caption “Anyone can be a father but it takes someone special to be a Dad.” Wow! It is important to recognize that earthly fathers are in no way perfect – and we need to never lose sight of that fact – and know that as hard as we try - we can never, ever be as good as God, the Father.

As we try to look at and understand the character of God the Father – here are four truths that we must never forget:

- God is the source of our existence. While there may be a great ‘big bang’ on Thursday nights on CBS – I don’t believe that a big bang brought us into existence. God spoke the world into existence with a ‘Word.’
- God provides for us.
- God corrects us.
- God loves us unconditionally. There is a Greek word for that kind of love. There are several different kinds of love that the Greeks identify – one being ‘philos’ – brotherly – like Philadelphia; another is ‘eros’ and you can catch the meaning of that one; and then there is ‘agape’ which is unconditional – sort of like your dog has for you – they just love you no matter what.

God spoke through the Prophet Ezekiel saying *“I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit.”* (Ezekiel 18:30-31) God goes on to say *“As surely as I live, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways”* (Ezekiel 33:11) Please remember that from the very beginning God

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has made it clear that He does not want to lose a single soul – but the choice is up to that person.

Even in judgment God is merciful. Abraham pleaded with God not to destroy Sodom if there were ten righteous people in that city, and God agreed (*Genesis 18:22–33*). However, there were not even ten righteous people there. But even when God did destroy the cities of the plain, He delivered Lot and his daughters and Lot’s wife too, although she was punished for looking back, disobeying the warning she had received from the angels in *Genesis 19:17*. Even when God punishes mankind for their sins, it is less than they deserve and is tempered with mercy and knowledge of the frailty of mankind (*Psalms 103:6–18*). These are not made up words but words given to us by God. Often mercy and grace are confused. Mercy is us not getting what we deserve or to put it in a theological way – Mercy is God not punishing us as we deserve. Grace is getting something that we didn’t deserve or ask for; we may have asked for it – but did not expect. Grace is God blessing us despite the fact that we do not deserve it. That is true love!

Sometimes God allows things to teach us valuable lessons from His Word, as the psalmist affirmed, “*It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.*” (*Psalms 119:71*). Let me just say this: in 1997 I had to have my right hip replaced and I never once asked God – ‘why me?’ In the year 2000 I had my left knee replaced – same thing. 2004 I had my left hip replaced. All before that, in 1994 I had 18 inches of my colon removed. Yes, I have a semi colon! I did not ask – but I have got to tell you that in ministry I have had the opportunity to speak with more people as they approached a joint replacement or even going for something like a colonoscopy to be able to encourage them God uses all things for good! There are a lot of times we can use what God has done. Some of you have had joint replacements; some of you have had more than one joints replaced and you know that God was with you the whole time. How often does a good father stand by knowing that his child may fall off the bicycle when he takes off the training wheels – he does not want his child to be hurt – but they have to learn through that experience – or even skinned knee in order to learn?

The Apostle Peter put it into perspective with this message of comfort and hope: “*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. (that’s like rehab!) These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*” (1 Peter 1:5–9) God Himself knew that we needed someone to help us to be better, and so He sent His Son Jesus to be the earthly image that we can try to emulate. We can try as hard as we want to – to try to be like the Father but Jesus took on flesh for a reason - not just to die! Peter writes “*But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*” (1 Peter 1:15-16)

Some erroneously claim that God the Father only loves us for the sake of God the Son but that is clearly a misunderstanding. Scripture plainly states that God the Father loved the world so much that He sent His Son as the Savior for whoever believes, and that He loved us long before we ever loved Him (John 3:16; 1 John 4:14–19).

The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians of the great love with which God the Father loved us “*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.*” (Ephesians 2:4-6) The Apostle John marveled at the “manner of the love” that the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God in 1 John 3:1–2. These are not the characteristics of some unpredictable tyrant but instead of a loving Father! Jesus is the means of reconciliation between a Holy God and a sinful, rebellious and sometimes self-centered humanity.

I think it would be most helpful for us to look at exactly why He sent His Son Jesus. Please open your Pew Bibles to page 1651 and let’s begin at verse 16. “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*” (John 3:16-18)

Despite our sin and rebellion, God loved us. God still loves us! The Father loved us enough to send His Son who died for us so that our sins could be forgiven. We when believe in Jesus we can die to self and the Spirit of God will guide us in living for Him. These are not just words – they are promises and proof of the salvation that can only come in Jesus Christ. That is true love!

Yes, God is holy, righteous, and just. Therefore He is a God of judgment, wrath, and vengeance. But these are not His only characteristics. God the Father is clearly shown in both the Old and New Testaments as

- merciful,
- long-suffering,
- gracious,
- and above all - compassionate.

The very fact that He promised and planned for our redemption right after the “Fall” in Genesis 3:15 shows how much He loved us; all of us! He chose to seek and offer us a means of salvation, Himself, even when we were His enemies. So God is both “*just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*” (Romans 3:26). That is a very powerful word – faith, believing, trusting. I think the Psalmist said it best when he contemplated the full scope of the character of God: “*Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed*” (Psalm 85:10).

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A good father, good parents want to provide for a good future for their children – by planning for college, for financial stability – a good financial start – and to be there when needed for guidance and correction – loving unconditionally. When that 5 year old looks at you and says ‘I can’t wait till I am 18 so I can move out’ – don’t worry. Look at the love that is in that young child’s eyes and the wonder when they learn something new. It is a true blessing. Hang in there because 18 will come and they will be loving you all the more – as you love them. God the Father has sought to provide for our future – our eternal future – by providing a means of salvation and freedom from sin: *“if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”* (Romans 10:9-10)

Listen to these words from the Prophet Micah who is amazed at the absolute depth of God’s love: *“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.”* (Micah 7:18-19)

Sometimes people feel it is too difficult to try to be like God, the Father – as Jesus told us in Matthew 5:48 *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* Well, the answer to that is to emulate the Son – Jesus Christ. Jesus, on the night before He died said this to His Apostles: *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”* (John 14:6-7) God the Father loves us so much that He sent His Son not only to save us but as a model for us to emulate, to try to live like, to try to be ‘Christ like.’ God, the Father has sent His Holy Spirit, so that in our efforts of trying to be like Him – we have a helper – to help us to be in relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – with no restriction. I grew up having a father who I wanted to emulate with all my heart. We lost him way too early, but then that wonderful man, Eric, came to me and said ‘I can never replace him - but I will be there for you’ and he was as good as his promise, as good as his word. God is as good as His Word. I was given role models; we have been given role models in God the Father, and God the Son. God sent His Holy Spirit to help lead and guide us – to encourage us, and help us to learn more about Him and His love for us. And so I want to encourage you today – to speak to Him – He is listening, providing, correcting, and above all - loving us unconditionally.