

My Family: Christ Centered?
“Try Listening to Your Father!”

Dear Friends in Christ,

I’m sure a lot of people here this morning, especially young folk, will “*check out*” when I begin this sermon with the phrase, “**Now, when I was a kid...!**” Surely, it means a lecture about how lucky you are, compared to the way it was when I was growing up. I know my teenage grandchildren kind of give me that “*look,*” tuning me out or turning up the IPOD. It’s kind of like, “*Here’s goes Grandpa again! Poor guy, he had to walk to school when he was a kid! Didn’t have a TV until he was 7 years old! Had to deliver papers, mow lawns, rake leaves, shovel snow and collect coke bottles to get the 2 cent deposit back just to have some spending money! No ATM’s or computers or IPads or cell phones! Ate everything that was on his plate, or else!*”

Maybe you and I reacted the same way when our parents or grandparents reminisced about the past, but humor me on this Father’s Day for a moment, because **when I was a kid, when my father spoke...I listened!** When my father said to do something, I did it! There was no backtalk, no sarcasm, no bargaining, no arguing, no

attitude and no whining (at least not to his face!) **When I was a kid, when my father spoke, I listened!**

Now, maybe that 2 inch strap around his waist had something to do with it - not that he ever used it on me; mind you, just my older brother? Was it simply knowing the consequence of disobedience that made me listen, or was there something else – an engrained sense of respect for authority; a recognition that he was the parent and I was the child? Even though he was no perfect Daddy and certainly a flawed father struggling with alcohol and his own life issues, **when my father spoke, I listened!** Despite the journey of a somewhat difficult childhood, he taught me respect for my elders; good manners, the value of hard work, and right from wrong. My father, despite all his flaws and failures was nonetheless used by God for my good, my heavenly Father shaping and molding me into the person I am today!

That is God's promise, isn't it, assuring those baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that we are connected to a higher purpose and plan. God, our heavenly Father, is an awesome God, who created us in his own image, His Word so powerful that when He said, *"let there be...it was!"* Our Heavenly Father's love for the world is so great, God *"sending His only Son that whoever believes in Him has everlasting life!"* If ever there was a **Father to be listened to** it is God, sending the Holy Spirit to call His children into a deeper, more personal relationship of faith and trust, so that Jesus

Christ can be at the center, the core and the heart of everything we say and do!

I love how the back of today's bulletin cover explains it [read it with me]: *“Jesus sends His Church to baptize. But not to baptize in just any name: to baptize in the name of the blessed Trinity. As Word and water join together, they bring the gift of communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And with Baptism comes the **lifelong joy of unpacking all that God gives there** – and most of all this promise of our Lord: “I am with you always.”*

So let's do a little “*unpacking*” today, my friends, focusing on what it means to **listen when our Heavenly Father speaks**, claiming the blessings God offers, “*observing all that Jesus has commanded,*” especially, given our sermon series, when it comes to life in the “*family!*” You see, I'm convinced that you, just like me, have some “*baggage*” to unpack? In fact, the longer God keeps me on this earth, the more certain I become that we are all “*hoarders,*” holding on to things that just kill relationships, stir up conflict, and keep families in an uproar. There's probably a lot of “*dirty laundry*” in most of our backpacks, because we hold on to sins, mistakes, disappointments and hurts that fuel anger and disrupt peaceful relationships. So many families and friendships are destroyed and kept on edge because we don't know how to “*unpack*” the blessings of our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

So, what's in your life suitcase, or mine – what joys and blessings are yet “*unpacked*” – preventing us from experiencing the fullness of life in Christ? Are we not listening to the Word of God which instructs us to “*love and forgive, accept and honor one another, as we have been so loved and forgiven?*” Have we not heard about this Jesus so boldly proclaimed by Peter in today's lesson as the Savior who was “*crucified and killed and raised up*” **so that** “*it might be made known to us the paths of life?*” (Acts 2:14, 22-28) Does not that pathway produce in our hearts and homes the fruit of the Holy Spirit which is “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?*” (Galatians 5:22-23) Would not relationships with parent, child, spouse, sibling, friend, co-worker, classmate and church member take on a very different and distinctive quality if we would but **listen** a little more **when our Heavenly Father speaks?**

At some point, my friends - *at some point* - this faith into which we are baptized into God's family has to impact our families and influence our daily lives, words and deeds. It just has to –and I'll never let you or me off the hook on this - because “*Jesus Christ did not die on a cross and rise from the grave so that we would go on living the same old, same old lives!*” Yet I do at times, so do you, doubting, not trusting, overwhelmed by the challenges of the day, frustrated by failures, never able to do enough to get it all right or make it right, seeking the good but choosing the bad. It's the daily struggle of every

sinner to **listen to our Father**, “*observing all that the Lord has commanded!*” (Matthew 28:20)

Thank God, today we get to “*unpack our bags*” again, re-claiming the joy of all our baptism blessings, cherishing the Savior’s promise: “*Behold, I am with you always, even to the close of the age.*” That mean’s every day, no matter what the day may bring, no matter how challenging the circumstances, no matter how deep the disappointment or loss, we do not walk the journey alone. That means no matter what happened in the past, good or bad, with our fathers or families that today is a new day to walk in the way of the Lord. That means no matter how distant faith has been, baptism perhaps just a ritual tucked away on a faded certificate; today is an opportunity to put Christ back at the center; the dynamics of family changed; our hearts and lives changed, because we have **listened to our Father!**

“When I was a kid, when my father spoke, I listened.” How I pray on this Father’s Day weekend that when God your Heavenly Father speaks, you listen, and that it makes a difference in your family! *May it be so, in Jesus’ name! Amen*