

“FATHERS WHO FAIL FAITHFULLY.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

June 20, 2021, 9 and 10:30 AM

Text for the Sermon: Acts 2:37-40; 16:30-34

Prayer: Holy Father, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth derives its name, show our fatherly love and compassion this morning by instructing your children in your ways. Send your Holy Spirit upon us we pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Introduction:

A couple of years ago when we are at Marc and Natalie’s wedding, my best friend who is a pastor was there and he was talking to our son Reed who at the time was anticipating the birth of his first child, Kohen. And my friend said, “Reed, you are going to be a terrible father.” And then he smiled.

What would you think if I said to Mike Brummel, “You are going to be a terrible father.” You might think I was being a terrible pastor to say that. Especially on Father’s Day, especially when he is excitedly looking forward to his first child.

Why would I ever say such a thing and besides how would I know he is going to be a terrible father, maybe he will be a great father? Let me give four reasons why I know that.

First, I know because of personal experience. I was and still am a failure as a father. My oldest and youngest sons are here this morning and I don’t mind at all confessing I have been and still am a failure as their father.

Second, I know because all the fathers I know think they were failures as fathers. All fathers are sinners, all fathers remember their sins as fathers, and every father lives with a nagging sense of failure at fatherhood. That is why I don’t say, “You have failed” I say, “We have failed.”

Third, I know because Jesus in effect says we are failures.

Luke 11:13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Jesus calls me an "evil father" and I am OK with that, coming from Him it is a strange comfort, that despite that, He loves me and hears and answers my prayers, He doesn’t treat me as my sins and failures deserve, but gives even more than I could ask or imagine. When Jesus speaks the truth to me about me, it draws me to Him.

Fourth, I know because every example of fathers in Scripture is an example of failure. When we look through the pages of Scripture at the fathers all we see are bad examples.

Abraham's sin with Hagar brought division and strife into his family.
Lot's sins against his two daughters while living in Sodom.
Isaac's sin of favoritism brought division and deception into his family.
Jacob's sin continued the dysfunction introduced by favoritism.
Eli's sin of failing to discipline his sons lead to gross immorality in his sons.
Samuel's sin in failing to discipline his sons.
David's sins led to adultery, murder, treason, treachery, anger, hate.
All failures, all leading broken, dysfunctional families.

We are not alone in our failure as fathers. My father was a failure as a father, and his father before him. I am a father-failure and I dwell among a host of father failures.

Why am I filled with all these encouraging words this morning?

Let's face it being a father is one of the hardest things a man can do, it certainly is one of the hardest things I have ever done. It is a job filled with endless opportunities to fail, to fall short.

Martin Luther once said, "Fatherhood is one fool teaching another fool." A sinner trying to lead sinners.

So, as one old wise person once quipped, "Anything worth doing, is worth doing badly." And I think he is right. In fact, it is the only way to get anything done worth doing, because none of us is perfect and perfectionist are some of the worst at doing things perfectly.

"If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly."

Being a father is worth doing, but none of us were prepared for how poorly we would do it. Christian fathers should be prepared to fail and to fail often and sometimes badly. So I call you to fail forward, fail faithfully, fail gloriously.

Don't fear failure. Don't let fear of failure lead you to not try. Don't let fear of failure cause you to not exercise godly, spiritual authority.

There is no perfect fathering, no perfect disciplining, no perfect correcting, nor perfect exercising of authority. We are all broken sinners and our very best efforts are always flawed in some way.

Don't be a father who refused to lead and take responsibility because of fear of doing it poorly. The best fathers are fathers who are first submitted to God and His Word, who are keenly aware of their own sin and humbled by it.

Since most of us like to find someone to blame for this failure, let me give you a scapegoat, someone else to blame. It is not your dad or your parents, it is not your teachers or coaches, it is not the educational system or the church or the government. It is not even your wife or yourself.

Blame Adam. Because of Adam's one sin he corrupted everything and most of all our hearts, and as a result he ruined fatherhood forever on this planet. Because of his sin we are all conceived in sin, born in sin, live in bondage to sin, and do all our parenting in sin.

Adam ruined fathering, he turned all of us into failures. He turned us into rebellious sinners, into passive-aggressive abdicators, into absent silent types, into responsibility shunning, selfish, self-serving sinners.

Adam traded the fatherhood of God for the fatherhood of Satan, and it has been all downhill ever since.

So what can we do? What should we do? Where do we turn?

First, humbly accept that failure is inevitable. You will sin. You will sin against your children.

Paul talks about this in Romans 7.

Romans 7:15, 18-19 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ... 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

What did Paul do with his sin and failure?

Romans 7:24-25, 8:1-2 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! 8 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Repentance and faith.

This brings me to the two texts Mike read before the sermon. Why did I choose these two passages for this topic? The baptism references were going to be a great connection to the baptism of Reid Kaptein this morning but that has had to be postponed until July when Brian's parents are able to attend.

Still these two texts give us the key to the Christian life, the key to becoming a Christian, the key to living the life of a Christian. Both texts ask the crucial question, "What must I do to be saved? What must I do with my sin and failure?" Peter says repent. Paul says believe.

Repentance and faith. It is the beginning and the end and every step in between. They are the key to being a husband and wife, and a father and a mother, to being a godly man or woman.

They are the only hope and help for fathers who fail, and they are the key to how to fail gloriously as a father. Do your fathering out of repentance and faith.

Hear me in this, this is important. In failure there is hope, we can still be a godly father. After the fall there is redemption. For sin there is forgiveness. In failure there is the love of God our Father shown to us on the cross of Jesus. We don't need to give up or make excuses. There is hope and help. Consider these two graces with me.

First, repent continually for your sins and failures. The Christian life is a life of repenting, daily repenting. Fathering (and mothering) is a life of repenting, daily repenting. Hate your sin, confess it, and then keep going in the assurance of the cleansing power of Jesus blood.

Model this for your wife and children. Let them see and hear you repent often. It will encourage them, it will increase in them respect for you as they see you wrestle with your sin. It will give them hope for their own sins being forgiven by our Father in heaven.

Taking responsibility is the definition of a husband and a father, and there is no more beautiful example of taking responsibility than when a father takes responsibility for his own sinful words and actions. It is in the asking for and giving and receiving of forgiveness that joy and healing comes, this is the Gospel being made real.

Nothing discourages children more from the faith than to see a parent who has the form of religion outwardly but who lacks an honest relationship with God especially concerning sin. Parents expect their children to be obedient to them, but what happens with children see parents not being obedient to God?

We discipline best when we ourselves are under the discipline of God and His Word.

Don't waste your failures, don't waste your sin, use it to point to God, use it to increase faith and hope in the forgiveness of Jesus. Paul boasted in his weakness as a way to boast in God's grace and power.

So every night you plead with God to forgive your sins and failures and you ask Him to redeem them, cover them in the blood of Jesus, and cause His grace to abound where your sin abounds.

Second, exercise your faith in God. Know whom you believe. Say with Paul:

II Timothy 1:12 I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

Fathers, be convinced and confident of the Gospel, that Jesus is the one who rescues and redeems and works all things together for good for those who love Him, who know Him, who trust Him.

Faith is the greatest of God's graces. Faith is our life blood. The life of a Christian is a life of faith. We live by faith, not by sight.

David was a failure as a father and he was a man after God's own heart. His honesty and humility lead to great worship, great psalms that speak to all our hearts and help us in our faith.

Look at the faith of the Philippian Jailer. Paul told him if he believed he would be saved, him and all his household and so it happened. He believed and all his household with him and they were saved. Believe the promises of God which are for you and for your children.

By faith claim the promise made by God to Abraham.

Genesis 18:19 For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.

God has planned for our sons and daughters to be taught, trained, disciplined, loved, nurtured, and disciplined by sinners. And to you children who are listening to what I am saying about your mom and dad, get rid of any expectations of anything close to perfection.

And don't compare your insides to other families insides. You know the sin in your own house, don't think there isn't any sin in all the other houses where they look all smiley and nice and happy. Give that idea up. By the way, forgive your fathers.

There is no perfection here on earth, there is no perfection in marriages and homes and parents and kids. Just like there are weeds in every garden, there are weeds in every heart and every home. All leadership and authority is flawed, the question is will it pursue godliness?

Repentance and faith. Repentance implies faith and faith implies repentance. One cannot exist without the other. We must have a growing awareness of the sinfulness of sin and of the greatness of grace, sorrow and joy. We are believing penitents and penitent believers all the way to glory. There is never a day that we do not come before God by faith to repent.

Repentance and faith are the cojoined twins of the Gospel. When Jesus came proclaiming the Gospel He said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15).

God will take your weakness, your failure, your sin, and He will add His abundant grace to it and you will see glorious success, for which you will have to humbly take no credit, but give Him all the glory. That is the best we can hope for. That in the midst of our sin, God will add His grace and mercy and blessing, beyond what we could do or ask or imagine, and that by His miracle our children will grow up to be godly men and women. That is failing gloriously.

Seek help from our heavenly Father.

Study and learn from the only perfect example. ***Look to the fatherhood of God*** and His relationship with His Son. To father like our heavenly Father is only possible by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and homes.

Luke 11:13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

What do you most need? Ask the Father for it, He will give you the very best of what you need.

Pray. When we pray, God works. Live your faith out loud, let it be seen and heard in your home and on your lips. Pray out loud. What we do, our kids will do. If we pray from our hearts in a vulnerable, honest and intimate way, there is hope our children will follow in our footsteps. That they will authentically lean on Jesus and not be ashamed.

Pray for your children, for the salvation of their souls and the sanctification of their lives by the Holy Spirit. Pray for God's grace to abound to them in their own sin. Pray for their repentance and faith.

Pray for your sins, pray for their sins. God delights to forgive fathers who fail. In our worst failures, we can pray and pour out our hearts to God who is faithful and powerful and can make saints out of the worst sinners. God is not hindered by our sins, our failures, our mistakes, our regrets.

Remember the promises of our heavenly Father. "I will never leave you or forsake you" (John 1:5). Only God can and will "turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6).

Failure is inevitable, but failure is not final, God is. God is a redeeming God. God has the last word, and the work of His grace is not dependent on us.

Conclusion and application.

I have the same regrets and failures most dads have.

I didn't spend enough time with my kids.

I didn't have as much fun with them as I could have.

I wasn't as intentional spiritually, especially in spontaneous and casual moments.

So here is the challenge for all fathers. Learning how to fail well and learning from your failures. As my friend says it, since you are going to fail, fail gloriously.

Fail confident not in ourselves but in Jesus Christ and the abundance of His grace. Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more.

Knowing there is nothing good in me, the good I see in my sons is evidence of God's grace and His faithfulness to His covenant promises when He said long ago to Abraham:

Genesis 17:7 I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

Prayer: Holy Father, here the cry of every heart here this morning for forgiveness, for healing, for help, for hope. Our best intentions still come out of sinful hearts. By the power of your Holy Spirit set us free from all our guilt and shame, by faith in the redeeming blood of Jesus. Thank you for overcome all our failure on the cross and giving us victory through Jesus. Save us and our households for your glory.