

June 19, 2022 – Luke 8:26-39 – Father’s Day

On Mother’s Day, I drew on the words of Psalm 23 to describe many of the traits and characteristics that mothers possess. I also said that many fathers possess those same attributes. Because I don’t want to give you the same sermon today that I gave then, I’m not going to list all those traits again. If you want to know what they were you can go to our website and read the sermon there. Instead, today I would like to draw on the life of Jesus to focus on one trait that Jesus exemplified. I think all fathers would do well to learn this trait and, in fact, many already have. This is a trait that many mothers possess as well. But as today is Father’s Day, let’s focus on them.

To begin, let’s take another look at today’s gospel reading. It’s a rather confusing and disturbing story of a man who the author of Luke said, “had many demons.” I’m not going to get into discussing demons today but want to look at what happened after Jesus had driven the demons out of the man. We are told he gave them permission to enter a herd of swine. When they did so the herd of pigs rushed down a hill into a lake where they drowned. This may seem to be a cruel act upon the part of Jesus but we must remember that for the Jewish people, swine are an unclean animal. It appears that Jesus was willing to sacrifice this large herd of pigs for the sake of one man. There is far more to this story that I’m not going to get into today.

So, what might this story tell us about fathers? Before I get into that, I must admit that I know I’m stretching things a bit, maybe more than a bit, but for the sake of this message, I hope you can humour me.

What is the one thing Jesus is known for most of all? It’s his love! But what kind of love is he especially known for? I would suggest it is his sacrificial love. We lift that up time and time again when we talk about Jesus. We worship him for that kind of love. We give him thanks for it. We remember it whenever we celebrate Holy Communion. We proclaim the message that Jesus “loved people so much that he gave his life for them.” In other words, he loves you and he loves me to such a degree that he is willing to die for us.

That’s the example Jesus has left behind for all fathers and all people to follow. Ouch! Now why did he have to go and do that?

Of course, Jesus left us other examples of what it means to love someone, such as the love of enjoying laughter with someone, the love of companionship, the love of working together for a good cause, the love of good food and fellowship, the love of God, the love of giving and receiving, the love of joining with other people for relaxation and renewal, and more. But for today, I would like to focus on what many would claim is the ultimate love Jesus demonstrated – that of sacrificial love.

We all know that there is a great deal of suffering in Ukraine at the present time because of the invasion of that country by the Russian army. As a result of that invasion, millions of Ukrainians have fled their country, seeking safety and shelter in other countries. But not all Ukrainians have left Ukraine. While children, many women and older people have left Ukraine, millions of men have stayed, and a great number of those men are fathers and grandfathers. These men, these fathers, and these grandfathers, are sacrificing their own safety for the safety of their wives, their young sons and daughters, and for other Ukrainians. These men do not want to die and are not choosing to die. But they are willing to die because of their love of their fellow Ukrainians.

Thankfully, we do not have to make that kind of choice here in Canada. We are not forced to make the ultimate sacrifice as they are. Canadians of previous generations did make that choice but at the present time we Canadians do not have to and we can thank previous generations for that. But there are other sacrifices fathers are called to make for their children here in Canada and in all parts of the world. When men become fathers, their lives are changed forever. No longer can they live just or even mostly for themselves. Some men who become fathers struggle with making such a change because of their own father's past behaviours or because of being harmed in some way in their own past or for some other reason. What happens to us as children and teenagers stays with us in some form for the rest of our lives. Our desire to look after ourselves first is something most people struggle with letting go of.

So often, when we think of the sacrificial love of Jesus we jump right to the cross and his death, but there are other types of sacrificial love Jesus taught us as well.

Sacrificial love may be the hardest kind of love for fathers and for anyone to practice. It requires a person to put their own needs and desires on hold so that someone else can have their needs

met. Not necessarily so that other people can have all of their desires met but certainly some of their needs.

I know of men who love to play sports, whether it be hockey, golf, or something else. In fact, I was one of those men and still am. However, when Sue and I had our first child, and then our second and third, I had less time to play those sports. I know of men who enjoy hunting and fishing with their buddies and who would spend their vacation time out in the bush at the hunt or fish camp. When they started families those times with their buddies hunting and fishing became less frequent. I know of men who like to own expensive cars and other expensive vehicles and machinery who sold those vehicles or no longer buy them because they no longer have as much money available. I know of men who enjoy their work so much that they spent long hours at it who now spend less time at work because their time with their children is needed and more important. I know of men who enjoyed their own leisure time with their wives who found they had less alone time with their partners when they had children. There are so many things that men enjoyed and spent their time and resources on for themselves that suddenly was no longer available to them when they became fathers.

For some men who were now fathers, this presented a great deal of sacrifice and pain. For other men who were now fathers, this seemed like very little sacrifice at all with minimal pain. As I said earlier, the same thing can be said for mothers, although the things they sacrificed may be different, but let's stay with fathers for today.

Now, why would fathers do that? Why would they give up some of the things that have brought them so much joy, happiness, and pleasure? Some of those fathers are fortunate to be able to continue to enjoy some of those activities, although to a lesser degree. Some of those fathers may have to stop them altogether for financial reasons, time restraints, or the particular needs of their children. Some fathers may find themselves raising their children on their own for some reason. Some father's may not have parents or family around to help or a partner who has died or is absent. I hope those men who become fathers and who are still able to participate in many of the former activities that brought them joy realize how fortunate they are. However, I hope those fathers have not done so at the expense or to the detriment of their children and families.

So, I ask once again, why would fathers sacrifice or give up some of the things they enjoy doing? There could be a number of reasons. Some may do so out of a sense of duty and

responsibility. Some may do so out of guilt. Some may do so out of necessity. Some may do so out of joy and thankfulness.

Why did Jesus sacrifice his own time and even his life for humanity? Did he do it out of duty or guilt? I don't think so. Did he do it out of necessity? I don't believe that. Did he do it out of joy and thankfulness? Yes, I think he did!

Offering his time, his resources, his talents, and his life to others was a source of joy for Jesus. Not the pain that accompanied it, but he was thankful that he had the ability and the means to help others and to improve their lives.

The same thing can be said for any fathers who offer their time, resources, and talents for their children. When they do so, the joy and the pleasure they receive when their children do well, are happy, are succeeding, and are enjoying life, is more rewarding than any sports activity, any outdoor activity with buddies, any work related success, or any leisure time. While giving up all or some of one's former activities that brought joy may cause some pain, the joy received from doing so can far outweigh any suffering. In fact, it may not even seem like suffering when their love for their children is great enough.

Does this mean a father should give up everything he enjoys for the sake of his children? I hope not because often that's not necessary or healthy. But there are times that may be required. Such as many fathers in Ukraine are now doing. Such as Jesus did. Such as some fathers here in Canada may now be doing. Such as some of you today may also be doing.

On this father's day I hope that all the fathers gathered here and living far away, and all those who serve in a fathering role anywhere may know the joy of sacrificial love. Any may the joy you experience because of it be far greater than any pain that may be present. In fact, may the joy be so great that there is no suffering at all.

