

The First Church of Evans
Week Eight - Mother's Day - Sunday, May 10, 2020

Greetings from Jerusalem Corners,

Happy Mother's Day! The passages and themes in this morning's service were suggested by Arlene Justinger, one of a good number of busy, committed mom's who make the world go round both in their families and in our family here at First Church. Arlene serves on our Church Council as our Congregational Life chair, pending her election at our Annual Congregational Meeting which is scheduled for later this year after the emergency ban on public meetings is lifted.

This week, our Adult Bible Study resumed in a go-to-meeting format on Wednesday evening, and we also presented our first worship video, something we hope to continue every week until we can worship in our sanctuary again. If you want information on how to access either the video or the Bible Study, email us at: ridges5@verizon.net and we will send you what you need to take part. Thank you for the faithful attention you have given these to services each Sunday.

Call to Worship

Proverbs 1:7; 2:6; 3:5,6

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline...

For from the LORD comes wisdom, from his mouth come knowledge and understanding...

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

An Opening Prayer

Our God and Father,

You have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding. We thank you for the blessing of fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters at home and in church. Please forgive us our sins and pour into our hearts such love toward you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which are beyond all we can desire; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Devotional

Proverbs 3:7,8

Don't be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn from evil.

It will bring healing to your body and refreshment to your bones.

When I was a boy, my father once told me, "Confucius say: Better to close your mouth and have people think you're a fool, than to open it and leave no doubt!" It wasn't until some years later that I read Proverbs 17:28 and realized that Solomon had said almost exactly the same thing to his sons. At the time, my father was stuck with a headstrong, outspoken, impulsive teenager who was just smart enough to be dangerous much of the time. Small wonder that it was during those years that I tripped and stumbled and injured myself to the point that I finally became tired of my own antics and gave my life to Christ.

And I think it was something in the forgiveness God promised me that convinced me that here was a Father I had better listen to. Here was Someone who had my true happiness and my real, best interests at heart. My antics had left me injured enough and lonely enough that I actually came to fear losing God's comfort and company and help. I knew God would forgive me, but I feared drifting into a state of heart, some way of life, where his love and forgiveness wouldn't matter to me and I would lose him.

The danger was never that God would stop loving me, the danger was and is that I might want something or someone to the point where I might choose what I want over what God commands and drift back into tripping and stumbling and injuring myself. Solomon put it this way, in Ecclesiastes 8:8, he said, "*Just as no soldier is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release the people who practice it.*"

"*Don't be wise in your own eyes,*" Solomon warns us in this morning's proverb. I have learned from hard experience that God's commands about life and love, right and wrong are wiser and better than where my heart might lead me in a bad moment. So Solomon urges us to "*...fear the LORD and turn from evil.*" We should fear the Lord the way a wayward soul might fear losing his last, true friend. We should "*turn*" from what the Bible calls "*evil*" because to indulge what is wrong estranges us from the one Person who loves us best and can help us most. Finally, Solomon promises that to be right with God and at peace with his commands is actually physically healing, not that good people never get sick or hurt, but that being at peace with the God who loves us lends us a sense of healing that makes the ordinary ills and injuries and sadnesses of life weigh less and hurt less.

Offering

Proverbs 3:9,10

Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce,

then will your barns be filled with plenty, and your vats overflowing with new wine.

Thank you for the faithfulness you have shown Christ and his kingdom during this season. Please mail what your heart leads you to give to: The First Church of Evans, Attn: Cindy Fanara, P.O. Box 364, Derby, NY, 14047.

(What follows is the script for the worship video we will offer this week via a link on our website: TheFirstChurchofEvans.com. If you cannot access the video, you can still join us by reading and praying and singing through our continuing Order of Worship.)

Greeting and Prayer

Hymn

“’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus”.

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Table Talk

Proverbs 3:11,12

*My son, do not despise the discipline of the LORD, nor loathe his reproof,
for whom the LORD loves, he reproves, just as a father, the son in whom he delights.*

So it’s kind of an irony that for Mother’s Day weekend we are looking at a passage, suggested by a mother, that is really about and aimed at fathers and sons. But it is fitting when we remember that mothers exist in the father, mother, sister, brother constellation that God set up for all of us to learn how love works in the give and take relationships we’ll all have to engage in as we make our way through life. I’ve already talked some in our printed devotional this morning about my own relationship with my father and how that never really came into balance till I found a Father in heaven who brought me into tow enough that I could begin to be reasonable and forgiving with my own human father here on earth.

Because fallen human fathers here and now, (and I am one!), we fathers can be a difficult puzzle for sons and daughters alike to solve. Men are different than women. A man can be particularly brave and wise and noble if he manages to devote his soul to a good cause. But a man who fails to do that can become spectacularly evil, wild and impulsive to the point of being foolish and dangerous and violent. The New Testament is loaded with warnings aimed specifically at men to lower their voices, put their hands in their pockets, get a grip on their passions and to learn the art of leading with the sort of love that Jesus practiced so perfectly with men and women alike.

It begs the question that, if men can go so spectacularly wrong, why has God chosen to designate himself using the male pronoun. Why is God a Father? Why is Jesus the Bridegroom and all his people the Bride, men and women alike? God designates himself male, I think, to teach the point that being a good man is a high calling indeed. The book of Hebrews says about human fathers: “...they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.” So God is holy, he is different from us. He possesses a goodness, he expresses a love that makes his discipline bearable and his authority respectable, and believing husbands and fathers are called to reach for that.

What I found when I became a husband and then a father is that a man can only offer his children those disciplines that he himself is willing to learn from God. We parents and teachers, men and women both, married and single both, can only lead the children and people in our care to the extent that we are willing to be led and disciplined by God ourselves. And the exercise is meant to be humbling. The book of Hebrews goes on to teach us this, it says: “For the moment all discipline is painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.”

For all the tumult that went on between me and my father, I learned patterns and disciplines from him that continue to serve me today. My dad taught me to read and to think and to work, but it was my mother who saved me. She brought me to church. She nurtured and believed in me in ways my father just couldn’t in those early years.

There’s no question that my relationship with my dad was the more painful and difficult of the two. But it’s also clear to me that I needed them both, that both of them pushing and pulling in their own way molded and influenced me so that one day my heart would be willing to be loved and forgiven and disciplined by God. These are lessons that men and women, fathers and mothers were meant to learn and teach together and that’s why all the forces of hell are so bent on tearing men and women apart.

Prayer *Matthew 7:7* “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.”

Please keep the governing authorities in prayer that they make wise decisions in response to the pandemic. Please keep our medical people and other first line public servants and their families in prayer as they selflessly face this danger to save the lives of sick and vulnerable people. Please remember our elderly loved ones who are at home or in care facilities. Please especially remember the Maybee, Willer, and Norton families as they mourn loved ones, and Eric DePan as he continues to recover from eye surgery.

Hymn

“Thy Word”

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An Ancient Benediction

Numbers 6:24-26 “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the LORD lift his countenance upon you and give you his peace.”

With love from The First Church of Evans, till our eyes meet and our hands touch again.