

Welcome

Good morning, this is Pastor Melinda, Tank and Sophia from Shiloh UCC. Today is Father's Day, so I changed my main reading to a different one. I hope everyone's enjoying today, but get ready, next week we will meet in person at Shiloh UCC. It's time to get back to going to church every Sunday. No more sleeping in Sunday mornings. :)

Opening Hymn: #52 There Is A Name I Love to Hear

Luke 15:11-24

11Then Jesus said, *“There was a man who had two sons. 12The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them.*

13A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.

15So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

17But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’

20So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

22But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

Let us pray!“Almighty God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O’ Lord our strength and our Redeemer.” Amen.

A Father’s Love

A couple had their first baby. After a month of taking care of the baby’s every need, the mother went shopping, leaving the little baby with the proud father.

It was only a short while before the baby started to cry. The perplexed father tried all kinds of tricks to nurture the little child, but nothing helped. The baby just kept crying.

After an hour of desperation, he took the baby to the emergency room. In the examination room, the doctor discovered a complex problem. The baby needed a new diaper. ☺

“I don’t get it...” the confused father cried, “The directions on the package said that it was good up to 8 pounds!” ☺

On this Father's Day I cannot help but think about all the amazing fathers in my life, who shaped the person I am today. I could give you a separate sermon on all of them, and in the future, I probably will. But today, let me talk about a very special father, my husband, Tancrede .

Tank is a great daddy. I couldn’t ask for anyone better than him to be Sophia’s father. Tank has loved Sophia from the first moment he could hold her tiny little body. He loves to play with her, read to her, and teach her everything about life. You should see how sweet they are laying in our living room, playing with coloring books. To be honest, I’m not always sure who enjoys it more... :) Tancrede is a wonderful father and he’s happy to watch Sophia when I’m busy.

Let me tell you a story about my husband. If you know Tank you know that he loves football. He grew up in the southern part of New Jersey, and ever since he was a little boy he has loved the Philadelphia Eagles. I'm sure some of you know that for the first time in the NFL's history, the Eagles won the Super bowl in 2018. It was a great season for the "Birds."

Can you guess where Tancrede was watching the 2018 Super Bowl? In the Special Care Nursery at the Catholic Medical Center in Manchester NH on the smallest TV screen you can imagine in the 21st century... oh and with NO sound. Tancrede was mostly watching our preemie, four pound Sophia, sleep in her incubator where they were trying to keep her little body warm.

I know this doesn't sound like a big sacrifice. It's just football. However, it was a big deal for the Eagles and it was a pretty big deal for Tank, too. Naturally, he was happy about his favorite football team, but he couldn't really celebrate or share his happiness with anyone. You can't be loud where sick babies are sleeping and where every single nurse wanted the Patriots to win. Tank and I were the only ones probably in the whole hospital that day who wanted the Eagles to win.

And that time, Tancrede just wanted to be there for Sophia, and he knew I was in bad shape. I was in and out of the hospital for the first two weeks after giving birth, as well.

When I was readmitted because of pre-eclampsia, Tancrede had to choose between staying with me or Sophia, because the baby and I were on two different hospital floors. Tancrede chose to be with Sophia, because he didn't want her to be alone when she woke up. So Tancrede stayed with Sophia all night long, watched her sleep in her incubator, and held her when she woke up.

Now that she is a big two and a half year old girl, Tank still loves her just as much, takes good care of her, and maybe even spoils her a bit. I think this is understandable when you have a miracle child at an older age. Tank is a good father and Sophia is blessed to have him.

I am also blessed to have a wonderful, hard working father, who raised me. He lives in Hungary with my mom. We talk on Skype pretty often, but I miss him. I have to admit I'm "Daddy's girl." I always felt close to my father, who told me interesting stories and walked with me in our hometown.

I am sure that this wonderful congregation has many fathers, too, who are not only fathers to their own children, but who are examples of faith and hard work to all of us. You are faithful Christians, who sacrifice for others unselfishly. You are the fathers of this whole congregation, who are teaching the next generation how to keep the faith. You are leading this community faithfully by example. Some of you spend so much time and energy serving Shiloh UCC that it's like a second job for you. We are grateful for your sacrifice, and recognize that without you, spiritual fathers, the church just wouldn't be the same.

Today we also remember the fathers who are with God. Their memory lives on in our hearts, and their sacrifices have changed our world for the better. When we teach others the lessons they taught us, their example continues to bless the next generation.

My grandfather, my father's father, Louie, and I were close. He was born in 1899 and passed away at almost 90. My family lived with him for a brief period of time before we moved to Hungary. That special time with him was an amazing blessing in my life. He taught me the first hymns I ever sang from the Hungarian Reformed hymnal. He also taught me about God from an old, dusty Bible that later inspired me to become a minister.

I wish he could have lived long enough to see the fruit of his labor. He would have been so happy that his granddaughter became a minister. He was a wonderful grandfather, and I miss him often.

However, even the best fathers, who do everything well, can learn from God's love and forgiveness. When Jesus told our Gospel story to his disciples, they understood well how much it meant that the father was running to meet his prodigal son. *Verse 20 reads: But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.*

The father in our story is so happy, that he can't wait for his son to get closer. In his enthusiasm, the father runs to embrace his child. Without hesitation he gives his son a robe, a ring, and sandals, and by these gestures the father publicly receives the prodigal back into the family. The father and the youngest son are now reconciled, and by love and forgiveness, the lost son finds new life.

The Prodigal Son receives all the benefits of being a treasured child. To celebrate the return of his lost son, the Father throws him a big party,

publicly inviting him back into the good graces of the community. The father went out of his way to treat the prodigal son with dignity and loving kindness. The father's unconditional love was so overwhelming that the younger son could return home with joy instead of shame.

And that is why the image of a loving father we find in the story of the Prodigal son is so close to our hearts. Maybe that's why most people know this parable. The story teaches us that no sin can ever separate us from the love of God. No matter what we have done, God loves us. God accepts us as we are, no matter how many mistakes we make.

God's unconditional love is like a compassionate father who opens his arms, and invites us back home. God is *like* a good father who forgives and forgets. God is *like* a good father, but at the same time so much more than a human can be. Powerfully immanent and transcendent, God celebrates every single soul who decides to come home.

In God's home, everyone's welcome, even those who went astray. But it's important to remember that God is not a simply a father. God is so much more than that. God can nurture you *like* a perfect cosmic father. In the silence of your soul, God's presence can run out to you and heal your pain. God can open the doors of the church and welcome you home, even when the Coronavirus discourages you. The almighty God can do anything, even be a good father, if that is what's needed.

However, if for some reason you were not close to your father, or your father was not present in your childhood, the image of God the Father may cause more pain than good. In that case the "immortal, invisible" God, will meet you where you are. The God who is beyond all images will comfort you and be the ground of your existence. Fear not for God is more transcendent than than any human being or image of the Divine. The great "I Am" cannot be defined or categorized. Being beyond words and concepts, It just Is...

After all these serious thoughts let's take a quick break. Our fathers deserve two jokes today! :)

A small town doctor was famous for catching extremely large fish. One day while he was on one of his famous fishing trips, he got called to an emergency. A woman was giving birth at a neighboring farm.

He rushed to the farm and delivered a healthy baby boy. After all the excitement was over, the farmer didn't have anything to weigh the baby with, so the doctor brought in his own fishing scale.

Amazingly, the baby weighed 21 lbs 13 oz.¹

I hope our fathers are relaxing and having fun today. Maybe you can go fishing, too. We are celebrating you. We are grateful to you for being there when we needed you. On this Father's Day, let us thank our fathers, grandfathers, husbands, "church fathers" and God, for welcoming us and teaching us about unconditional love. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer Let us pray! Compassionate God, on this special day we ask you to bless our fathers with happiness and joy. Hold them in your care, and help them feel appreciated by their loved ones.

Gracious God you uphold the universe with wisdom, prudence, and love. In your presence our souls find rest and comfort. Transform our bodies and minds, that like Christ we may spread your love throughout this community, and the larger world.

Benevolent Healer, you uphold your creation in times of sickness and health. Today we petition you to sustain your servants. Be with everyone today who was affected by this terrible epidemic. Heal our world and send your angels to the lonely.

Thank you for listening to our prayers that are said out loud or in the silence of our hearts. Heal the wounds that are too tender for human words, and strengthen our hands and feet to do your will in the world. Help us bless this community with the love, peace, and understanding that comes only from conscious contact with you.

And now, join me in praying the words Jesus taught the disciples, saying; "Our Father..."

Lord's Prayer

Hymn #449 1. & 4. vs. Softly and Tenderly

Benediction

Good bye

¹ source: <http://www.jokes4us.com/sportsjokes/fishingjokes.html>