

*The Ultimate Daddy*

*Genesis 18: 1-15, Romans 5: 1-8, Matthew 9: 35-10:8*

*June 15, 2008*

I want to begin my sermon with you today with a letter I found on the Internet from a college student to her parents. This student writes:

*Dear Mother and Dad:*

*It has now been three months since I left for college. I have been remiss in writing and am very sorry for my thoughtlessness in not having written before. I will bring you up to date now, but before you read on, please sit down. You are not to read any further unless you are sitting down... Okay?*

*Well, then, I am getting along pretty well now. The skull fracture and the concussion I got when I jumped out of the window of my dormitory when it caught fire shortly after my arrival are pretty well healed now. I only spent two weeks in the hospital and now I can see almost normally and only get three headaches a day.*

*Fortunately the fire in the dormitory and my jump were witnessed by an attendant at the gas station near the dorm and he was the one who called the Fire Department and the ambulance. He also visited me at the hospital, and since I had nowhere to live because of the burnt-out dorm, he was kind enough to invite me to share his apartment with him. It's really a basement room, but it is kind of cute. He is a very fine boy and we have fallen deeply in love and are planning to get married. We haven't set the exact date yet, but it will be before my pregnancy begins to show.*

*Yes, Mother and Dad, I am pregnant. I know how much you are looking forward to being grandparents and I know you will welcome the baby and give it the same love and devotion and tender care you gave me when I was a child*

*I know you will welcome him into our family with open arms. He is kind and although not well educated, he is ambitious. Although he is of a different economic status than ours, I am sure you will love him as I do.*

*Now that I have brought you up to date, I want to tell you that there was no dormitory fire, I did not have a concussion or skull fracture, I was not in the hospital, I am not pregnant, I am not engaged, and there is no boyfriend in my life. However, I am getting a "D" in History and an "F" in Science, and I wanted you to see these marks in the proper perspective.*

*Your loving daughter, Dorothy*

Whether you are a parent or a child, Father's Day can leave us with a sort of "rawness," can it not? We might feel that we can't do just the right thing to show our love for our dad. We are not sure that we turned out the way that dad wanted us to be, even if dad told us that he loves us just the way we are. If dad is dead, we have questions that seem to have gone with him to the grave.

Sigmund Freud said in his writings that God is a projected creation of the human soul of an idealized parent. For the atheist Freud, God is the ultimate daddy that we never had. Freud said that there is no God and we just need to grow up. We worship and praise God because we could never perfectly please our parents when we were children, so we spend the rest of our lives trying to please a made-up deity. God changes from being the subject of all reality to being the object of our human fantasy.

I have to tell you on this Father's Day that I have not been blessed with the *ultimate* dad and mom, but they are awfully good. For me they are like Abraham and Sarah of our story that we'll look at in a little more detail. Both of my folks are the perfect models of people-oriented persons, but they have given me different gifts. My mother gave me the gift of laughter. From my mother I learned just how disarming laughter truly is; how it produces chemicals in the brain that lift your spirits even when the world seems to be closing in on you. She used it most effectively when I got in the most serious trouble. I remember as a high school student when she would find things in my room of which I should not have been in possession. She had this way of making light of these revelations that relieved the

terror in my heart and replaced it with laughter. Make no mistake. She got her disapproval across, but her light-hearted humor communicated her unconditional love to me in the face of terror or embarrassment.

My dad gave me the gift of showing unmerited favor to other people. And he does it best by showing absolute interest in whom they are and in what they are doing. Dad can make you feel like you're the only one in the room. He makes you feel that he only has eyes for you. I remember early in my business career calling him with problems that seemed insurmountable and by the end of the conversation those problems seemed as light as feathers. He also showed me how to leave things in this world better off than I found them. His object lesson was how to use the sink of a public restroom. In my childhood, after we washed our hands, he would thoughtfully take paper towels and wipe down the entire sink area. He would comment that the restroom manager was the most unnoticed person who had the job that was most unappreciated. That lesson has such broad application in our world.

In our Bible story from Genesis we have a picture of the ultimate mom and ultimate dad. Since it is Father's Day I'll spend most of my time on Abraham. Sarah names her child Isaac, which means "laughter." This is because she was so old when learning that she would have a child that she laughed. Do we also take our own religion or ourselves too seriously? That's a good lesson to remember. But let's look at this ultimate dad, Abraham. Abraham is daddy to three world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It was through Abraham that God promised a chosen people,

a great land and an everlasting covenant. It is in Abraham that the Apostle Paul understood simple faith, a trust that we as Christians have come to understand in the gospel of Jesus Christ as God's grace accepted as unmerited favor. All of this began with Abraham and Sarah. But Abraham also troubles us. What kind of parent would be willing to sacrifice his own child? What kind of God would give up his only begotten child? We struggle with this, partly because we don't believe that we, while we are still sinners, could be worth this kind of sacrifice. We said this in our corporate confession today, but do we accept ourselves as really that important? Even still, Dads, could we ever offer our own children?

But this text from Genesis shows us just how faithful and radically hospitable Abraham could be. Three strangers are nearing his tent. Abraham jumps up and offers them a footbath, a place to rest from the stifling heat of the desert and a humble meal. Was this meal really humble? Let's just say that a bushel of flour is 56 pounds of bread! That's a couple hundred loaves for these guests! That's a lot of carbs! And he offers cheese, milk, and the finest veal for their meal. Now he did not know who they were or what blessing they would bring. That's radical hospitality. Contrast to his nephew Lot. Lot in the city of Sodom only offers a humble, quickly prepared loaf of unleavened bread. Now the sin of Sodom was inhospitality. You know that, don't you! But I digress. Abraham is the subject here - radically hospitable and radically faithful in a God who took the many years until he approached one hundred years of age to deliver on the promise of his own son. Would we wait that long for God to deliver on God's promises?

Probably not, for there is a qualitative difference between Abraham's faith and the way our faith usually works. You see we grow impatient because we have a "in order that" faith rather than a "because of" faith. Let me explain. We demonstrate trust in God for a list of "in order that's." We trust God in order that we can receive material or spiritual blessings; we trust God in order that we will look good; we trust God in order that we will gain that fleeting peacefulness. Abraham fell into those traps as well; but what made his trust different is that (at his best) he trusted God because God had already blessed him first. In fact, all the way back in chapter 12 of Genesis, years before in Abraham's life, God promised to bless all of the nations of the world through Abraham. Abraham never stopped trusting in that first promise through all of his wanderings. That's what made him the ultimate parent.

Sigmund Freud would disagree with all of this. Freud only understood the "in order that" quality of faith. All projection of love on God Freud would say is to gain the favor that we could never have with earthly parents. It is to somehow make up for the lack of relationship we have with our human parents. Freud would not have understood a "because of" faith. For Freud everything is motivated by the needs of our egos, not selfless love for the other or out of simple gratitude. Abraham's faith extends beyond what can ever be seen or experienced in the present moment. Faith always comes before understanding. It is through faith (trust) that we can ever reach for spiritual understanding. That's why I choose Abraham, not Freud, as my ultimate daddy.

Jesus knew this as well as he compassionately called the apostles to the needs of the lost children of Israel. Jesus felt the hopelessness and the fear of the crowd to the depths of his very being. He gave the apostles all the instruction they needed to preach, teach and heal. But in the final verse he explained why. It is because they have already freely received that they have the power and authority to freely give. Have you received in freedom the power of Jesus' healing? It comes in many forms – healing addictions, healing relationships, physical healing of your body, healing of resentments that you have held on to for your entire life. In Christ you have been given the freedom to receive healing. But you have to believe and trust that healing can really work in you and through you. It doesn't come from your understanding. You can honestly say of healing, "I don't know how this happened or why this has happened. But it has!" I pray that you in this moment of prayer can recall and give thanks for the blessings that God has given to you in freedom and that you can be a blessing, like Abraham, to all of the nations in the ways that you can freely give.