

“Hey, Dad ...”

An Interactive Sermon on Father’s Day and Choir Celebration Sunday
United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT
June 18, 2017
Text: Ephesians 6:1-4

Happy Father’s Day! How many of you have Father’s Day traditions? (pause for show of hands) What are some of them? (pause for responses and reflect back) My memories of Father’s Day growing up center on my mom’s coconut cream pie – my Dad’s favorite – and a weekend at our lake house where, near as I can remember, my mom and dad worked and worked on the cottage while I lounged around on the dock and in the lake. As I think about that now, I realize it was not especially “dad-centered” and yet I know it was exactly what my Dad wanted to do, which is why we did it.

Father’s Day is a funny holiday. It is not shrouded in big expectations and hoopla in the same way Mother’s Day is. I don’t see tons of flower bouquets and plants with “Perfect for Father’s Day” signs urging us to buy them. There are ads for things like grills and power tools for dad, but those are some big bucks items that many folks can’t afford. And, if those kinds of things are in your budget, there’s a good chance Dad already has what he wants in those gift categories. So, Dad maybe is the center of a family gathering of some sort and maybe a few cards and phone calls fill in the gaps. Most Dads I know are fine with this. “I don’t really

want the fuss,” is a common response. “Time with the family is all I need.” That was certainly my Dad’s mantra every year. And that never felt right to me, but then again, Dad was Dad and part of loving Dad was accepting that he never wanted any fuss. Perhaps your dad was the same way.

I know I am blessed to have had a wonderful relationship with my dad. He and I were and remain quite a lot alike, much to the consternation of my mom and my brothers. Over the years there have been other men who have had an important influence in my life – several college professors and my first boss, but none of them ever came close to my dad. Dad and I were of like minds on so many things, except one. Dad and Peter never really hit it off, most likely because Peter was nothing, *nothing*, like my dad. And Dad never understood why I would fall in love with someone who was nothing like him. But, by my wedding day, my dad had decided he needed to trust me to know what was best for me and that was enough for him. I think that was one of his greatest gifts to me – his trust in me to be my own person, to make the best decisions I could in any given moment because that’s what he taught me to do. Thanks, Dad.

So, thinking about Dads and the other men who have been “like dads” to us, I came across this text in Ephesians and I was fascinated. Not the whole, “children obey your parents” thing which reflects this text’s position as a part of what is called “the

Household Codes” in the New Testament. These are, in essence, specific rules about how Christian households are to be structured and operate. The Codes are essentially a fleshing out of what is meant by the Commandment to “Honor thy mother and father.” This Ephesians text correctly points out that this Commandment – the 4th or 5th depending on how you number them – is the only one of the Commandments to have a promise attached to it.

“Honor thy father and mother, so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” Clearly, this relationship between parents and children is sacred and has been for millennia. This is precisely why this next verse is so very interesting and more than a little perplexing – “And, fathers do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Fathers, do not provoke your children! Imagine that! It’s an acknowledgement that Dads have been irritating children for thousands of years!!

You know what I mean. Take a moment and think about it. How many of you can recall an incident with your dad, or another man central to your life, which made you crazy?? (pause for show of hands) Yeah, me too. The one which always comes to mind for me happened when I was about 17 years old. I was heading out to some sort of dance or party at the beach and I had a new halter dress on – they were all the rage in the ‘70’s. My dad took one look at me and said, “nice dress.” “Thanks!” I said. Then he

turned to my mother and said, “she’s not leaving the house in that until you reduce the view.” He meant that he expected my mom to get out her sewing kit and sew shut the rather open bodice of the dress. “Dad!” I hollered! “No thread, no dress, no party” he said. And that was that.

The thing is Dads doing their job in raising their children often have to aggravate, provoke, irritate and just generally annoy their children. It’s what they do and often they pay a price for it. But so do we if we fail to recognize the love and wisdom their irritating actions reflected for us. Now I am not saying all Dads are wonderful. They’re not. But I am hoping that everyone here has had at least one man in their lives who has loved them enough to be annoying and irritating at just the right moment. To illustrate what I mean, I am going to show a brief clip from the Story Corps animation series on PBS. I apologize in advance because I know this will not be easy to see in this light-filled room, but I think this is worth the effort, because the words of the story being told actually mean more than the illustrations which go with them and with our new speakers for our projector, you should be able to hear!!! Thanks to Bob and Lynn Murray for finding the speakers!!

So, now please enjoy the story of “The Saint of Dry Creek.” (show video) What do you think? Anything in this story connect with some part of your story? As you think about those times

when you were annoyed or embarrassed by your dad, or a like-dad in your life, how did you respond then? How do you see that same situation now?

As a way of inviting all your dads and “like dads” into this Father’s Day reflection, I’d like each of you to find that little piece of plain blue paper in your bulletin for this morning and take out a pen or a pencil. Let us know if you need paper or a pen! Now, I’d like you to think about that one man from your growing up years who had the most influence on you – your dad or grandfather, or maybe an uncle or a teacher or a coach. Write that person’s first name on one side of the paper. Then, under the name write one word to describe what you most loved and admired about this person. (pause while people write) Now, turn the paper over. On the other side, I invite you to write that person a very brief thank you note for what they meant to you. We’ll give you some time to do that. (pause) When you are finished, you can fold the paper or not. Then, as we sing our hymn of response, I invite you to bring those notes forward and place them on the altar as a way of honoring these special men in our lives.

So, once again to all those dads and “like dads” out there – Happy Father’s Day. I hope this day is exactly what you would like it to be. And, by all means, enjoy being annoying and irritating to your children. Isn’t that what being like a father to someone is really all about??? Amen.