

“Hey, Dad ...”

A Message on Father’s Day

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT

June 20, 2021 (First preached on 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.

I recognize that I am indeed blessed to have had a wonderful father. I am also aware that not everyone has been so blessed when it comes to dads and moms. I know Father's Day, as well as Mother's Day, is a very tough day for those folks as it reminds them so poignantly that they have no such father or mother to celebrate. My hope and prayer for these folks is that somewhere along the way they have had someone who was like a father to them – a teacher, a Scout leader, a coach, even a boss. We all need a special man to look up to in our lives and those of us who name our father as that man are truly blessed. It's important to remember that.

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. This part of the Codes is 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 given what we know about the strictness and traditionalism of the Household Codes – “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 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. And for the people not fortunate enough to have had a wonderful, loving and involved father, it is quite a loss difficult if not impossible to overcome. As I said a moment ago, I don’t want anyone to think I am minimizing that reality which I am keenly aware is all too true for too. But I also feel we need to acknowledge on this Father’s Day Sunday the essential role fathers do fill in one’s life even as I know not everyone is blessed with that reality. I am hoping, though, 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. Did this person prevent or guide you away from a really bad decision or did he support you without question in the aftermath of one? Was he there for you when no one else was? Spend some time pondering that question throughout the day today. Then consider how you might let your dad know, wherever he is, how much you appreciate that moment. If your dad is still living, give him a call if you won’t be seeing him. If your dad is already in God’s nearer presence, write him a note of thanks or just go somewhere private and talk to him. I promise, he’ll hear you. And he’ll be smiling.

Before I end this morning, I do need to acknowledge a rather momentous thing which happened this past week when President Biden signed into law the reality of a new federal holiday – Juneteenth. This new holiday will commemorate June 19th as the day when the abolition of slavery was completed in this country. According to the *New York Times*, this is what Juneteenth is all about:

[“Juneteenth commemorates the end of slavery](#) in the United States. Its name stems from June 19, 1865, when Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger in Galveston, Texas, issued [General Order No. 3](#), which announced that in accordance with the Emancipation Proclamation, “all slaves are free.” Months later, the 13th Amendment was ratified, abolishing slavery in the final four border states that had not been subjected to President Abraham

Lincoln's order." ("Biden Signs Law Making June 19th a Federal Holiday," June 17, 2021, Annie Karni & Luke Broadwater)

Honestly, I don't know what my dad would have thought of Juneteenth. He was a pretty traditional guy and he thought there were already too many federal "days off" when he was working back in the 1970's. The thing to remember, though, is that Juneteenth is not about my dad, or yours, really. Juneteenth is about all those dads borne into slavery who had to watch in agony and helplessness as their children were ripped away from them, brutalized by the institution of slavery which only benefited white people. The Juneteenth celebration is all about those fathers, and all the fathers in slavery who preceded them and all the fathers who have come after them who have had to watch their sons die and be imprisoned at alarming rates. Juneteenth is a celebration of the reality of freedom which recognizes that, in this country at least, all people are created equal in the eyes of the law. And this, dear ones, dovetails perfectly with our belief that all people are equally beloved by our God; no matter the color of our skin; no matter the way we understand our gender and sexual orientation; no matter the cash in our bank accounts; no matter how we choose to practice our faith or even to have no faith at all. Our freedom, dear ones, is grounded in how precious we are to God. On June 19, 1865, that truth became law in this country and on June 19, 2021, finally we celebrated that truth as a nation. It only took us 156 years to figure out how important this is to fathers and mothers of color in every corner of this country. Thanks be to God we finally have gotten there.

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.