

"The Best Dad Ever"

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For a moment I would like you to think about fathers. Some of us, like myself, grew up with great dads who worked hard to raise us as responsible, faithful adults. Others of us maybe didn't have the best father. Maybe he was not around much or was an alcoholic or even abusive. Maybe you never even knew your father. But whatever your experience was with your own father, all of us have some idea of what a father *should* be.

Last week we started a new series on the basics of the Christian faith looking at the Apostles' Creed and we talked about what it means for us to say every week, "I believe." Believing in God means more than just believing that God exists. Faith is a matter of trust. When we say, "I believe in God," we're saying, "I trust God. I trust him with my life."

So the logical next question is, "who is God?" What do we mean when we say "God." Throughout all of history people have claimed a belief in all sorts of gods. Today there are many different religions in the world and most of them would say they believe in a god. So as Christians, who are we talking about when we say, "I believe in God?" And just as importantly, how do we know who God is?

That's the question that much of the Apostles' Creed seeks to answer in the three main sections affirming belief in God the Father, God the Son, Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit. We call this the Trinity or the Triune God. We know God in three "persons," yet one God.

So today we're going to look at what it means to call God the

Father Almighty. When I was young I thought my dad was perfect. There wasn't anything that he couldn't do. He was big and strong and seemed to know everything. But over the years some cracks began to form in that image. In fact, by the time I was a teenager, I couldn't believe how much he *didn't* know. I must say, though, that in later years he's come a long way.

The point is that as great as my dad is, he's not all-powerful or almighty. He is a sinful human being like every one of us. But we say that God, on the other hand, IS all-powerful. As we look at what it means to refer to God as "Father Almighty," we are going to look at two attributes of God. On one hand, God is far above us, much more than our minds can understand. He is outside of time and space. God is totally self-sufficient. He doesn't need anything or anyone. Not even you. We call that the transcendence of God. That begins to help us understand God as Almighty.

On the other hand, we believe that God is always near us. In fact, in Christ, God is present *within* us. We call that imminence. As a pastor friend of mine used to say, God is nearer than breathing, closer than hands and feet. This helps us understand God as Father. So to help us really understand these concepts, I want us to consider three points: revelation, ruling, and relationship. Let's begin with revelation.

Because he is so much more than we can understand, the only way we can know anything about God is because he chooses to

reveal himself to us. In the Old Testament we read about the ways that God revealed himself to various people. He spoke to Noah and commanded him to build a boat. He spoke to Abram and commanded him to leave the security of home and family and go to a new land. In the passage we just heard from Exodus, God says, "I revealed myself to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty." But then he tells Moses his personal name. He says, "by my name YHWH I did not make myself known to them."

It seems to me that it's a big deal that God revealed his personal name to Moses. Names are important. For instance, names help us distinguish one person from another. Our name identifies us as an individual but a name can also describe us, such as a nickname. If this is true for you and me, it's especially true of God. By revealing His name, God is giving us some understanding about who He is. That's the *revelation*.

God told Abraham, "I am God Almighty," El Shaddai in Hebrew, which literally means "God of the mountain," meaning the strong, mighty, all-powerful God. He is the *ruler* of the universe. In Reformed theology we talk about the sovereignty of God. We're saying that God is the only King. He's the One who is really in charge in our world and in our lives. And He is powerful enough and concerned enough to take care of us. God is able to supply all of our needs and as Abraham and Moses learned, what God promises, only God can deliver.

We need to learn that lesson also. As one pastor has put it, "We all need to recognize and admit our own insufficiency before we can experience the all-sufficiency of God." This is what the Apostle Paul means

in our passage from Romans 8 when he says, "to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed it cannot." Then in verses 10 and 11 we read, "But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."

Jesus promised you that not even a hair can fall out of your head apart from God's will. It looks like some of you are experiencing a lot of God's will, by the way. This Almighty God is able, as Ephesians 3 says, to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think. What God has promised to do in Jesus, and has already done, is to bring new life to us who are dead because of sin. El Shaddai, God Almighty, is powerful enough to save us.

So we've looked at *revelation* - we only know anything about God because He has revealed Himself to us in His Word and most fully in Jesus. We've looked at *ruling* - God in Christ is the king. He is all-powerful and all-sufficient. The third thing I want us to see is God's interest in a *relationship*. One thing we understand about God existing in three persons is that His very nature is relational. This is where the language of God as Father comes in.

In the gospels, Jesus refers to God as Father 170 times. It's the primary name Jesus has for God. Actually, the Aramaic word that Jesus uses is "Abba,"

which is better translated as "daddy." It's a very personal, intimate term. It's sad that in recent years there has been a movement to avoid using the term "Father" in reference to God. The argument is that someone who had an abusive father or no father is not able to relate to God as father. But as I said earlier, I think all of us have an idea of what a father *should* be like. And that idea comes from the perfect Father who is the pattern for all fathers.

For us to understand Jesus as the eternal Son of God, it's only natural for us to confess God as Jesus' Father. But here is the beautiful thing about our passage from Romans. Verse 15 says, "you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father! Daddy!" In our union with Christ, when God the Father sees us He sees Jesus. God is now *our* Father. Jesus tells us that when he says, "when you pray, pray like this: Our Father..."

Just as we said that God is transcendent - outside our ability to know Him - He is also imminent. He is as close as our next breath. Why does He do it? God certainly doesn't need anything from us and we can't provide Him anything anyway. But He wants a relationship with you. A deep personal relationship built on trust. To confess that we believe in God, the Father Almighty is to declare to one another and to the world that he powerful, almighty, transcendent God in Heaven desires a Father-child relationship with you. How amazing is that? Does your life matter? You bet it does.

Let me conclude with one last thought. God the Father is always calling us into a relationship with Him. What does that look like? It certainly includes reading the love letter

God sent to us - the Bible. We should be hungry to read and study His Word. Relationship means spending time in conversation with God every day through prayer. And it means passionately worshiping Him, not just for an hour on Sunday morning, we should be worshiping all the time, but every Sunday morning should be an amazing

encounter with the risen Christ and that depends on how prepared and excited we are about worship.

Finally, we need to see that by revealing Himself to us in His Word, in person, and in our lives, God is inviting us to look for His presence in the world around us. But that call always requires a response. That response includes believing in Him, but responding also means being the hands and feet of Christ in our world. It means seeing people the way God sees them. May we each truly believe in God the Father Almighty. May it be so for each of us today.

Amen.