

Christmas Day 2022
John 1:1-18

SERMON TEXT: OUR CHRISTMAS DAY GOSPEL, FROM THE 1ST CHAPTER OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

A father's relationship with his children is extremely vital to their emotional and social well-being. The negative effects of a child without a father can be seen in countless studies and reports.

For example, consider these numbers from the United States Department of Justice report. Children from fatherless homes account for:

63 percent of youth suicides

90 percent of all homeless and runaway youths

85 percent of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders

71 percent of all high school dropouts

70 percent of juveniles in state-operated institutions

75 percent of adolescent patients in substance abuse centers.¹

Children do best when they know and are raised by both a father and a mother.

But sadly in this world broken by sin, even when dad is present, it doesn't mean that everything will go well. Authors and screenwriters have long recognized the complex relationship that often exists between fathers and sons and have used those tensions to create well-known stories.

How many Hollywood movies can you think of that revolve around the relationship between fathers and sons? Most prominent of all, may be when Darth Vader in *The Empire Strikes Back* revealed to Luke Skywalker – while they were fighting – that he was, in fact, Luke's father. There is *The*

¹ Office of Justice Programs, "What Can the Federal Government Do to Decrease Crime and Revitalize Communities?" <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/172210.pdf>, 1998.

Godfather, a story really about sons trying to not disappoint fathers; *Finding Nemo*, a story about an overprotective father and a wayward son; *The Tree of Life*, a story that explores the generational effect of how fathers raise their sons; and *The Lion King*, another story about a son who feels like he can't live up to his father's expectations.

We know both how **important** fathers are and how **difficult** our relationships with them can be. In our midweek Advent series this year, we have explored three different father-and-son relationships found in the Old Testament, all of which ended in disappointment and, often, in tragedy.

Cain, the son of Adam, was not the promised Savior that Adam and Eve hoped that he would be. Rather, he continued in his father's sin, becoming the first man to commit murder, slaying his own brother, Abel.

Ishmael, the son of Abraham, was not the promised son either. Abraham and Sarah thought that they had to take matters into their own hands in order to produce an heir for Abraham. But they soon learned the folly of not trusting fully in God and trying to produce on their own what only God could do.

Absalom, the son of David, despite his father's great love for him, ended up disappointing his father as well, rebelling against him and losing his life in the process.

All of these stories, both from the Bible and Hollywood, help point us to the most complicated father-son relationship of all time. It's the story of God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth, and the children He created, the sons of men. This is our story.

Though we desperately need the presence of our loving heavenly Father in our lives for our well-being, we have rejected Him time and time again through our sinful and foolish ways.

Like Cain, we have not lived up to the expectations given to us in the 10 Commandments and have become murderers through our sinful thoughts and words and actions. Like the story of Ishmael, we have tried to take matters into our own hands, thinking that our good works will earn God's love and favor. But our efforts are doomed to fall short and drive us further away from God. Like Absalom, we have rebelled against our heavenly Father and King, wanting to rule our own lives instead. But this only leads to death and condemnation.

Rather than trust in our heavenly Father's guidance, which is always wise and good, we prefer to place our trust in political figures, or our money, or in ourselves to find salvation in this life. Rather than listen to the truth that our heavenly Father speaks to us, we prefer to listen and place our confidence in the opinion of others.

Our story is a story of wayward and stubborn children who have a Father who is even more stubbornly pursuing us out of His great love. It is a story perfectly captured by Jesus in His parable of the prodigal son.

You recall that story. The younger son of a wealthy and generous father demanded his share of the inheritance. He may as well have said to him, "I wish you were dead already so I can have your stuff!" With his words, he murdered like Cain. With his actions, he rebelled like Absalom. Yet even more shockingly, the father gives his son what he wants and allows him to walk away and out of his life.

Yet, the father never stops looking for his son and hoping and praying that he will return. Though he had every reason to be, he was not angry at his son. He simply wanted another opportunity to show him how much he loved him. And finally, when the son had wasted all of his father's money

and found himself at the end of his rope, his father got the chance to demonstrate just how great his love was for his son.

The prodigal son knew he did not deserve his father's love or even a place in the family again. He merely wanted to return as a servant. Perhaps, he thought, he could work his way back in. With his focus on his own works, he became like Ishmael.

But his father would have none of it. Before he can even speak, the son is embraced tightly, clothed in the finest robe and sandals, and given the family ring, a symbol of his status as a son of the father. A celebration is planned, a fattened calf is sacrificed, because the son who once was lost has been found, the son who once was dead is alive again.

This story begs the question: how could the father love his son like this? How could he just receive him back as if he had done nothing wrong? **And would God do the same for us?** These are questions that are answered by the story of Christmas.

The Christmas story tells the story of the only perfect Father-Son relationship that has ever existed. This relationship has existed since before time began and it will continue to exist throughout eternity.

It is a relationship that is proclaimed in our Christmas hymn:

How glad we'll be to find it so!
Then with the shepherds let us go
To see what God for us has done in sending us His **own dear Son**
(LSB 358:6)

It is a story that is told in the first chapter of John's Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known. (vv. 1–2, 14, 18)

God the Father knows how much we need Him, despite our rejection of Him. We need to know our Father. It is the only way to find true joy, peace, hope, and life. **And in order to make us children of God, God sent His only-begotten Son into the world – the Son of Man and Son of God – to be the perfect Son that we could never be.**

Jesus is the true Son of Adam who is the promised Seed foretold in Genesis 3:15 and who committed no murder with his thoughts, words, and actions. Rather, He was murdered that we might live.

Jesus is the true Son of Abraham, the One who would bless all nations, by taking our salvation into His hands and giving to us His righteousness.

Jesus is the true Son of David, the King of kings, who remained perfectly obedient to His Father, and yet became a curse for us by hanging from a tree.

Jesus is both the Son of Man and Son of God, the Prince of Peace, and when His breath departed, God's plan of salvation was complete – God and sinners reconciled.

Because of the gift of His Son, God reveals to us, that He is, in fact, our Father, who loves us and forgives us and gives us the right to become children of God. God adopts you and makes you part of His eternal family through your Baptism into Jesus. What God said to Jesus at His Baptism, God now says to you through yours: "This is My son. This is My daughter, with whom I am well pleased."

You are not a fatherless child. You do not have an absentee Father. Though you don't deserve it, you have a perfect relationship with your Father who has given up His only-begotten Son for you and who will always love you and care for you and shield you with His presence, just like a good Father should do.