

**Christ Church Cranbrook**  
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan  
Sermon for June 16, 2013 ~ Father's Day | Proper 6C  
The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

Theologian Karl Barth said that every sermon should begin by speaking of grace. Only after grace is experienced can one be open enough to God to do any genuine repenting. If Barth's conviction is valid for all sermons in general, it is certainly valid for a sermon on Father's Day. I say that because when I remember my own father and examine the way I have lived my role as a father, I am almost overcome with the need to do some industrial strength repenting. But, you see, I am aware that my father before me and his father before him also felt guilty about their performance as fathers. One of the closest encounters with grace was a day almost exactly thirty-two years ago when I sat with my dad in the garden of his home and we wept together when we finally had that conversation in which I was surprised to learn that he had been carrying around a burden of guilt over what he perceived to be a poor performance as a father. At the same time, I unburdened myself of the load of guilt I had been carrying around about being a lousy son. Each of us was surprised by the feelings of the other! We both experienced grace. He shared with me that he and his father had a similar conversation once. In the few remaining days we had together before his death, our relationship was uncluttered by those secret feelings of disappointment and inadequacy we had carried around for years. It was grace, not anything we did or didn't do, that finally made our relationship right, or in Biblical terms, justified.

So, on this father's day, when I am aware that similar feelings exist between my son and me, and perhaps between many of you fathers and your sons and daughters, I want to open the window and let a fresh breeze of God's pure grace blow through. If we are thinking today of how we want to be better fathers or better sons or better daughters, we need to be reminded of the central role grace plays. This grace is, after all, the unmerited, unilateral love and favor that flows from the very heart of our Heavenly Father. God loves us even when we are disobedient. If we really want to be God's sons and daughters, we're going to have to trust that good news to be true and if we really want to be good fathers, we're going to have to make it clear in the living of our lives that we believe it. That means we are going to have to experience grace so that we can stop all our attempts at *self*-justification. Whether it is a job, possessions, vengefulness, or some macho attitude which is the driving force in your life, you will never find justification there and your children will be short-changed in the faith department because you are not teaching them to live by faith in the invisible yet ever present God. You are teaching them to live by faith in visible yet transient human pursuits.

We live in a time when the role of men in families and in societies has been so confused and compromised that in recent years that men have been described as adrift "in a sea of confused identities, emasculated egos, and misplaced priorities" (Steven Mintz, p. 25, *American Families Past And Present: Social Perspectives on Transformations*, Susan M. Ross ed.) There is a way out of this. And, it is not the way *back*! It is the way *forward*. It is the way where men experience and live their lives out of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is the way of true repentance where confidence in God's grace liberates them to stop chasing the buck, stop chasing skirts, stop chasing unredeemed power, stop abandoning their families, stop abandoning their spirituality, and stop abandoning their true glory. It is not the old way of male domination and macho masculinity. It is the way of the man of God who gives his life to serve his family graciously and faithfully. It is the way of the man who says with St. Paul, "...it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

*If you and I want to live the grace filled life*, we are going to have to take up the means of grace. This involves a re-ordering of our priorities. The means of grace are not offered on the golf course on Sunday mornings. This parish offers numerous opportunities for worship, service, formation, and fellowship that encourage us and our families to reorder and refocus our lives around the means of grace. The worship and praise of Jesus Christ is necessary to hang on to that grace and grow in it.

*If you and I want to live the grace filled life*, we are going to have to repent of self-serving, ego-centric, macho ways. We can't be faithful stewards of the vocation to serve our families if we are not there! I read an article in my hometown paper by a mother who praised her husband for declining participation in a golf tournament over a weekend because he was committed to being with his family at home and in church. He said, "when my sons are older and don't want to be with me, then I'll play more golf."

*If you and I want to live the grace filled life*, we are going to have to work at being partners with our spouses. The old rabbis explained the meaning of the Biblical story of God's creating Eve from Adam's rib by saying that it meant they were to stand alongside one another as partners in life. So many men have abdicated that partnership. In earlier eras, men abdicated it by seeking domination. In this era, abdication looks more like disappearance. Today more than one-third of our nation's children live apart from their biological fathers. The rate of child poverty is five times higher in single-mother households. Fatherlessness is cited as a major contributing cause of juvenile crime. Dads need to get their spiritual act together so they will experience the grace of God and discover that life is not about taking power away but about giving it away, to others, to our spouses, to our children so that all might live an abundant life.

*If you and I are going to live the grace filled life*, we are going to have to let our families know when we are feeling a need for forgiveness. We are going to have to know how to be more vulnerable. We are going to have to start being more accountable. We need the encouragement and support of others, watching over one another in love, to keep us honest, to keep us true to the commitments we have made, and to help us reap the benefits of such a life. It's like a 12 step program for men who are addicted to destructive patterns of masculinity.

*And, if you and I are going to live the grace filled life*, we are going to have to learn to be trustworthy, to stand in the gap for our families and others. When I was a child, my dad taught me that there are certain men who can always be relied upon. He was a part of a fraternity of men who had formed some sort of mysterious bond grounded in a set of values and a sense of godliness. My dad was a Freemason. He said, "anytime you see a man wearing the Masonic emblem, you can always count on him to help you if you have a problem." I have always found that to be true. I'd like that to always be true. But I'd like to go a step further. I'd like for us to be able to teach our children that there are Christian men everywhere who can be counted on to help them if they ever need help - encouragement, guidance, protection, and wisdom. And, I'd like for us to be able to teach our children that by starting at home. If you and I want to change the world, change our city, change our families, we are going to have to let God change our lives first. Can you think of a better Father's Day gift for the families God has given into our care?