

John 1:1-14 - “This Is My Son: Jesus”

The Nativity of our Lord/Christmas Day 2022 [adapted from a series by CPH]

Statistics show how important a father is when it comes to their children’s emotional and social well-being. According to the US Dept. of Justice, 90% of all homeless and runaway youths come from fatherless homes; 85% of children that exhibit behavioral disorders __; 75% of adolescent patients in substance abuse centers __; 71% of all high school dropouts __; 70% of juveniles in state-operated institutions __; and 63 % of youth suicides __. Children do best when they are raised by both a mother and a father.

But even when dad is present, that doesn’t mean that everything will always go well. Over the past four weeks, in our midweek services for Advent, we’ve been hearing about father-son relationships in the OT which didn’t go well: Adam and Cain, Abraham and Ishmael, David and Absalom. Most likely, we can all relate to these challenging father-son relationships in our experiences with our own fathers, or in being a father or parent of a son or daughter who has not always been a cooperative little angel.

All these father-son/parent-child relationships point us to the most complicated father-son/daughter relationship, and that’s the one between our heavenly father and you and me, since we’re all far from always being cooperative little angels. Even though we desperately need the presence of our loving, heavenly Father in our lives for our emotional and social well-being, we have rebelled against Him again and again through our sinful, foolish ways.

Like Cain, we have not made the best use of the gifts God has given us as His born and born again children. Instead of taking care of our neighbors that God has blessed us with, we have become murders, like Cain, through our sinful pride and jealousies. Like Absalom’s rebellion against his father, King David, we have often rebelled against our heavenly Father and King by wanting to rule our lives according to what we think is best instead of what God tells us is best in His Word. Rather than trusting in our heavenly Father’s guidance, we often prefer to place our trust in the things of this world, in the opinions of others, or in ourselves when it comes to doing what’s best for us.

The story of our lives is the story of sinful, stubborn children who have a sinless Father who is even more stubborn in His pursuit of us because of His great love for us. It’s a story that’s similar in many ways to Jesus’ parable about the prodigal son. In this parable, as you may remember, the younger son of a loving, wealthy father demanded his share of his inheritance. Such a request before his father’s death was like saying, “I wish you were dead so that I can have more of your stuff!” By his request, the younger son was saying that he valued money and possessions more than his relationship with his father. How often do we do the same thing when it comes to showing what we value most, the things of this world or our relationship with our heavenly Father?

Surprisingly, the father in Jesus’ parable gives his rebellious son what he wants. But at the same time, the father never stops hoping, and no doubt praying, that his son would return. Even though this father had every reason to be angry with his son, he was not angry. Instead he hoped for another opportunity to show his son how much he loved him.

Finally, when the son wasted all of his inheritance and found himself at the end of his rope, he decided to return to his father, but on his terms, not his father’s terms. But again, the father, instead of punishing his son for his shameful actions, shockingly took the shame of his son upon himself by running out to his rebellious son to welcome him home. It’s the humble, loving action of this father that caused the son to truly repent of his sinful ways and rejoice in his father’s patient, forgiving love.

This parable may cause us to ask questions like, How could that father receive back his rebellious son as if he had done nothing wrong? Or, how can God ever forgive me for my sinful ways? These questions are answered in the Scriptural account of the only perfect Father-Son relationship. This relationship existed before time began, and it will continue to exist throughout all eternity.

We sing of this perfect Father-Son relationship in many of our Christmas hymns. Like “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” where we sing, “Son of the Father, now in flesh appearing.” Or in the hymn, “Silent Night,” where we sing “Silent Night, holy night! Son of God, love’s pure light.”

Our Gospel reading for this morning also speaks of this perfect Father-Son relationship, which includes an amazing act of God’s love on our behalf. *“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.”*

God the Father knows how much we need Him, despite our rebellion against Him. So, in order to turn us around and restore us as His faithful children, He sent His only Son into our flesh so that He could also be the truest Son of Adam, Abraham and David—the perfect Son of God and man in Jesus Christ that we apart from Him could never be.

As the perfect Son of God and man, Jesus was perfectly obedient to His heavenly Father even when it meant being cursed in our place by hanging from a tree (see Deuteronomy 21:22; Galatians 3:13), the tree of the cross. Through His perfect obedience and death our sins were punished so that we could return to our heavenly Father on His terms, according to His love, and His merciful forgiveness.

In the Psalm we’ve been using during our midweek services we’re reminded to: *“Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish”* (Psalm 146:3-4). Thankfully, because Jesus is both the perfect Son of Man and the perfect Son of God, the Prince of peace, when His breath departs, there is salvation; God and sinners are reconciled.

Through the gift of His Son, God the Father reveals to us that He still loves us sinners and forgives us. And through this Good News and the gift of Holy Baptism God welcomes us back into His family, like the father in Jesus’ parable welcomed back his son. What God said to Jesus at His Baptism, He says to us at our Baptism: “You are my son/You are my daughter, whom I love. With you I am well pleased.”

We do not have an absentee Father. Though we don’t deserve it, God is with us to make possible a perfect Father/son/daughter relationship through the gift of faith. He, who was willing to allow His only Son to go through the suffering and death that we deserved so that we could be delivered from our sins, promises us in His Word and Sacraments to always love us, to take care of us, and to keep us trusting in Him as our almighty, loving Father. It’s this love of God that enables us to bow our heads in repentance and faith to receive our Lord’s forgiveness and salvation. All glory be to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children’s Sermon] What are some of the things your parents do for you to let you know that they love you? Not only do they probably tell you that they love you, but they also feed, clothe and protect you, and much more. For example, did they give you any gifts this Christmas?

A gift is something that you are given even though you didn’t work for it. Were all of you perfectly well behaved before Christmas? No doubt there were times when you could have behaved better. Yet you parents still gave you gifts, not as a reward for your less than perfect behavior, but because they love you.

The same is true with God. He lets you know how much He loves you by not only giving you loving parents, but especially by giving you His only Son who became a human being like you and me when He was born as the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. And the main reason He became one of us was so that He could later die for our sins and then rise from the dead to show us that He has the power of God to save us—to make us His sons and daughters forever. Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection for our salvation are the greatest gifts God gives us this Christmas, which enable us to love God and others like God loves us.