**June 17, 2018**

**Dads & Grads**

**Fourth Sunday after Pentecost**

**First Presbyterian Church**

**21 Church Street**

**Pittsford, NY 14534**

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**Proverbs, Parables, and Paternity**

1. Perhaps this experience sounds somewhat familiar.
   1. Imagine standing in a store aisle, Muzak numbing the senses and hoping to find just the right Father’s Day card to pithily summarize a foundational relationship, for better or worse.
   2. Oh, the pressure!
   3. Should this card be destined for a biological parent, how do we acknowledge this Father for being a part of bringing us to life?
   4. And if this is in any way an adopted parent, how do we acknowledge this Father for being a part of shaping our experience of life?
   5. Now imagine looking not for a card, but just the right words to acknowledge God’s giving us abundant life.
      1. How would we do it?
      2. Now we have a sense of how difficult it must have been for prophets like Ezekiel, apostles like Paul and even Jesus himself as each attempted to faithfully communicate the awesomeness of God and the grace God offers each one of us.
2. Each author’s attempt to do so in our lectionary today is a puzzle.
   1. Ezekiel acknowledges at the outset of this morning’s chapter that he is speaking in a proverb when he describes God’s seemingly odd behavior.
   2. Paul’s letter starts by saying we are confident for we walk by faith and not by sight.
      1. I don’t know about you but when I don’t walk by sight, I end up with bruised shins.
      2. Paul’s language here is intentionally metaphorical or figurative.
   3. Perhaps the most familiar of today’s texts is Mark’s gospel which includes not one, but two parables.
   4. Proverbs, metaphors and parables – what are they, how do we differentiate them, and what on earth are they supposed to mean for us today?
      1. A metaphor is defined as the comparison of one thing to another without the use of like or as.
         1. Proverbs and parables are both metaphors.
         2. The same Holy Spirit who prompted Solomon to tell riddles in the book of Proverbs or the Prophet Ezekiel to write about shoots of cedars as in today’s text also inspired Jesus to tell the stories we churchy folk call parables.
         3. Proverbs and parables provoke and invite interpretation.
            1. They make us wonder to what the proverb is referring and how the parable is to be applied in our lives.
   5. Proverbs and parables are fantastic teaching tools because their metaphorical basis allows us to set aside our own egos as we consider these life lessons from a perspective beyond ourselves.
      1. Not surprisingly, the Bible uses both kinds of metaphors to get across the same truths.
      2. Proverbs melt into our minds while parables hunker down in our hearts.
      3. Proverbs tend to emphasize earthly life while parables hang out in the heavenly realm.
      4. Proverbs are pithy and to the point while parables permit prolonged plumbing of their wisdom.
      5. Proverbs provide clarity when a direct answer is preferable while parables provide depth when a ponderable position is preferable.
   6. The proverb from the prophet Ezekiel, the metaphor in Paul’s letter and the parable in Mark’s gospel are all trying to describe the character and action of God.
      1. From Ezekiel, we learn how God takes a tender sprig from the topmost of a cedar and plants it on the mountainous height in order that it might produce boughs under which every kind of bird will live and reproduce.
         1. This proverb teaches us God’s presence makes the seemingly impossible possible.
      2. From Paul, we learn that confidence in Christ helps us navigate new life.
         1. This metaphor teaches us we can trust God.
      3. From Mark, we learn that no matter who plants seeds, even as tiny as mustard seeds, God gives the growth without human help.
         1. This parable teaches us God is the power behind good growth.
      4. In other words, our lessons for today tell us God is a presence we can trust to be a powerful force for good.
         1. This summation transports me right back to the greeting card aisle as I choose my dad’s Father’s Day card.
            1. My dad has steadfastly been a rock-solid, reassuringly powerful presence in my life regardless of the vicissitudes of my parents’ divorce or the vagaries of my teenage wanderings.
            2. I picture him dancing with me when I was little, allowing me to step on his feet and making me feel like a little princess.
            3. I am nostalgic thinking of the father-daughter dance at my wedding to Bill.
   7. Michael Kelly wrote this in the New York Times about his own nostalgic moment.[[1]](#footnote-1)
      1. As daughters do on wedding days, mine took my breath away.
      2. At the joyous reception following the marriage of Bridget Ann Kelly, 34, and Eric Michael Strauss, 39, it came time for the bride and her father to dance.
      3. Though everyone said she looked stunning, I inevitably recalled seeing her 10 years earlier — not in boundless joy but in utter heartbreak.
      4. Tubes protruded from her mouth and her nose.
      5. A machine helped her breathe. At 24, she had very nearly lost her life to three gunshots from a stranger.
      6. As I entered her hospital room, just the two of us present, her eyes met mine in piercing grief.
      7. Bridget grew up in Omaha and graduated from St. Louis University.
      8. Eric grew up on Long Island and graduated from Tulane in New Orleans, where he worked for the college television station while studying political economics.
      9. He graduated in 1996 and moved back to New York to be a desk assistant at ABC.
      10. Through his work he would eventually meet Bridget.
      11. Bridget started her teaching career at Fort Hood, Tex. On June 21, 2002, after she picked up a friend from a late flight and dropped her off, Bridget returned to her apartment.
      12. A man who had lurked in the parking lot kicked down her door, abducted and robbed her, and drove her to a secluded field. He raped her, shot her in the back three times and drove off.
      13. She had terrible internal wounds, but her legs worked. She somehow made it 200 yards to the home of a veteran, her first hero that night. Rescuers got her to the hospital where she endured a six-hour surgery.
      14. The crime and Bridget’s story, first reported locally, soon drew wider interest because she wanted the rape to be reported in the articles with her name as the victim.
      15. Her message — that she had done nothing wrong and bore no stigma or shame — resonated with many.
      16. She was invited to speak at anti-violence rallies and has become an advocate for so many others.
      17. She flew to New York in February 2004 to meet with Charles Gibson, who interviewed her for ABC’s “Primetime.” There, she met Eric, an ABC news producer who was in charge of the interview site. He was also assigned to fly to Texas to shoot video of Bridget in her home and classroom, and to interview others.
      18. After the shoot, Eric and Bridget went to Wendy’s and discovered a connection.
      19. Eric was interested romantically, but he was concerned.
      20. “I didn’t want to be inappropriate or violate our trust after all she had gone through,” he said. “I didn’t know if she was ready for a romantic relationship.”
      21. After surviving her attack, Bridget accepted the help she needed and says she does not experience flashbacks.
      22. The romance blossomed, Eric proposed, a priest and a rabbi co-officiated the ceremony, and guests toasted the happy couple at their wedding reception.
      23. During our father-daughter dance, I looked at the room in awe, thinking no one could have predicted this.
      24. Ten years ago, bleeding and alone in the field where she had been left to die at 24, my daughter stumbled to a house in the dead of night. She said later that she felt as if she had been “lifted up by God.” I asked somewhat bitterly where God had been 10 minutes earlier.
      25. In the greatest testament of faith I have ever heard, she calmly replied, “God was there holding my hand.”
      26. Now Eric has taken her hand, a union surely blessed by God.
      27. Proverbs, parables and prophetic daughters of patriarchs point us to the truth:
          1. God is a presence we can trust to be a powerful force for good.
3. Let me take us back to the greeting card aisle.
   1. Have we found what we’re looking for?
   2. Ah, here is just the right card!
      1. Thank you, God for your powerful presence.
      2. In proverb and parable, you have taught us well.
      3. You have given us the confidence to walk by faith and not by sight.
      4. May our lives continue to be shaped by you, so others witness your glory. Amen.

1. Michael Kelly. “Vows” *New York Times*. July 20, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)