

Psalm 72:1-7

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

Matthew 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothes? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Sermon

Since the earliest parts of the Bible, the term Father has been used for God. One of the reasons for this term is that it is a term we can wrap our heads around. I'm not sure how to describe the infinite, but I can begin to relate to a Father. It is also good to note that the Bible does not limit itself to talking about God only as a male, but also utilizes maternal imagery to describe God as well. But the Bible was written in a time where patriarchy was the norm in society. The role of fathers was definitive as head of household which meant it was the Father who had to protect, provide, and give direction for the family. The father had to be sure that his family was fed and clothed, that they had the basic needs provided and that they faithfully lived out the law.

And so, in a society that looked to the fathers in this way, it is also easy to see how the title of father was bestowed on, first God, and later upon the king. Isaiah's titles ring out for a new king, a king who will be an everlasting father for the Children of Israel. And our Psalm for today reminds us that this king, father, should not only protect his people from the oppressor, but also care for the least among the people - the poor and needy. This is the legacy the psalmist calls for, a reign that lives on in peace and righteousness.

And yet the early church adds this to the titles of Jesus, and suddenly we become confused by names. Can we call Jesus the everlasting father when the normal titles for him have been Son of God or Son of Man? We struggle with the fact that Jesus speaks of "his father in heaven" in a way that leads us to separate the two and continue to think of the Creator God as the everlasting father. This controversy becomes so great that the Gospel of John has to go out of its way to tell Jesus' story so that it connects the father and son perfectly "if you have seen me, you have seen my father, for we are one." Yet this Christology does not clear up the mystery that is the Triune God.

But even if the title father, seems ill equipped to describe Jesus, the role of the everlasting father seems to fit him to a tee. Look at the way that Jesus treats his disciples, look at the way that he treats the strangers and the outcasts, the poor and the needy. Jesus embodies the fatherly role of caregiver. Jesus feeds the people with his word and with loaves and fish. Jesus heals the sick and touches the untouchable. Jesus speaks to the enemy, the outsider, the Samaritan - and Jesus talks to the insiders as well, the scribes and the pharisees. The role doesn't have to get turned upside down, it is just that the role of the father king is taken up by one who was called the Son.

Yet I don't want to lose the title father too quickly. To some, I am known as son, and to others I am known as father. I wonder if Jesus might fit both titles equally well. If Jesus was a father, who would his offspring be? Though there is some speculation to whether or not Jesus was married and/or had offspring, the Bible does not speak to this. But I would contend that Jesus did think of his disciples as his children. It was to his disciples that he passed on his responsibility and it was to his disciples that he ultimately calls to take up his responsibilities, to care for the least among us. The Father teaches the son to become a father themselves.

And, in time, the sons of Jesus took up the role of father, and with the Holy Spirit they ushered in the church and the church has continued to rebirth new disciples into the world, an everlasting legacy of our everlasting father.

And here we are today, the disciples of Christ gathered at White Lick Presbyterian. And Jesus instructs us in the imperative of caring for the poor and needy, the stranger and the prisoner, the sick and the hungry and thirsty. And today we share gifts with families that are poor, we share food with families who are hungry, we share coats and hats and gloves with people who are cold. The church continues to work of the father, and we teach out children to do the same.

I heard a story from a member in the last few weeks, a story about one of the saints of White Lick. She was a leader in hospitality, helping to cook and she was the first to welcome a visitor to worship. One day she looked at this member and said, "You need to start learning, because one day you will have to do what I do." And today, she is one of the leaders of our congregation.

The church is at its best when it teaches its members to not just be people who come to worship, but teaches them then to lead by faith. It is not enough for a few people to do the work of caring for the least among us. We all have a role to play, we all have a calling to follow the example of Christ. And together we will glorify the everlasting father. Thanks be to God for continually calling the church to care. Amen