

## The Voice of Your Father Speaking Through You

Matthew 10:16-20

Cradock Presbyterian Church

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I've thought a lot about what fathers are like, and I've come up with this: Fathers are like Paul, or maybe Moses. Fathers hand down the traditions that prepare us for things in life. When we do lots of things, we can hear our fathers' voices, almost. It's as though the spirit of our father is speaking to us directly. We remember those things.

You know what I'm talking about, don't you? Let me give you some examples from my own life – just like you expect me to, when I'm preaching on a day like this! Years before Nike came up with "Just do it," I remember a time when my Dad said about the same thing. I'd found a \$20 bill on the ground in a parking lot as we were walking along. I was a little guy at the time. I really expected to keep it, you know, "Finders keepers, losers weepers." My father said No. "Somebody's lost that, and they're going to need it," he said, "so let's go in the store and report it to the manager." We did; he told us he'd had a customer earlier tell him he'd lost a \$20 bill; he had the man's name and number, so he was going to call him up and let him know it had been found. When I asked Dad how come we didn't keep it, because I knew friends who would have kept it, he said, "If you know what the right thing is to do, you just do it." I've never forgotten.

I remember, too, the many times we did things that involved applying liquids to something. Could be washing a car, or mopping the floor, or painting the house, whatever. I was like most kids, you know, I'd just work away at random. Dad would get especially annoyed when we were painting, because I wouldn't be going back and catching the drips. I don't know how many times he told me, but I can hear him now: "ALWAYS start at the top, and work down!" You know, when I've helped with youth group car washes, I find myself saying that! It's as if the Spirit of my father is speaking through me.

Now, that's a trivial thing, I know. There are more important things that dads hand down. If you heard that story about George Washington and the cherry tree, you know, "I cannot tell a lie," you probably heard it from your Dad. A different take on that that I've heard many fathers say, is "If you lie you have to remember what you said. If you tell the truth, it's easier." Not the highest moral teaching, is it?! But it sure does stick.

I think that one of the most powerful things about fatherhood is making morals like that

stick. When I was little, I think I was like most kids – I knew what *punishment* was all about, and I did my darndest to try to avoid it. I don't remember what event it was that I tried to squirm out of, but I do recall once getting a much worse spanking for lying than I expected for whatever I did wrong. And with that came the words: "Always tell the truth – it only makes things worse when you lie." Even today, I think that has as much to do with my honesty as wanting to please God. Whenever I think about lying, I can still hear those words of my father. And I pass 'em on, too! I've actually heard myself saying those words to younger relatives, and to young people I deal with today. Dare I say that this is the Spirit of my father speaking through me? Along with the thing about truth, of course, is the thing about "take it like a man," about the punishment, I guess, or whatever painful thing was going to befall me. I bet all of you, guys and gals alike, had to deal with some variation of "You've got to stand up for yourself!" That one defies gender-typing – all of us need to have courage from time to time. And all of us, in our lives, get opportunities to stand up for something important to us. Do you hear that voice when you do? Do you hear your father saying "You've got to stand up!"

Jesus had a sense, I'm sure, of what we're like. Even though he was God, he was one of us, too. So we ought to listen to his insights on our human character, and on what we need, because he's been there, *as God*, living life with us. As we hear this passage from Matthew, we know that Jesus was talking to the disciples about their going out into the world. It was going to be tough. There were going to be natural dangers, dangers any person of that day and time would face. But there were also going to be dangers that confronted them *specifically because they were Christians*. Mobs would seize them, and threaten them. Their own Jewish authorities would arrest them, and possibly even exclude them from fellowship or expel them from the synagogue. The Romans would arrest them, and sometimes even execute them. In every case, they would have, not just a crisis, but an opportunity. That opportunity would be to tell about Jesus.

How do you and I do on that? I bet each of us has had more opportunities to speak than we know. But we don't take note of them, maybe because we don't have near as

many crises. If someone threatened to throw you out of some organization because of your Christian views, what would you say? If you were threatened with losing your job, and you knew through the grapevine it was because you were a church-going Christian, what could you say? That just never seems to happen; and yet, I wonder how we'd react if it did. We'd need help, I think. And that help would probably come to us through the speaking of the Holy Spirit.

See, that was Jesus' point! He *knew* those disciples were going to have to suffer, and offer their lives up for God. He knew that his church was going to suffer persecutions and be sorely tested. He knew that there would ALWAYS be people who opposed *his* people – and we see that even today. So, he did what any father would do. He tried to get them ready for what they would face. He tried to put in their heads a voice, that later they'd know was the Spirit of their Father – their *heavenly* Father – speaking to and through them. I'm convinced that Jesus sees to it that we get those words we need, and hear those things in the Spirit we're supposed to hear, and so grow in our faith and in our witness, and build God's kingdom.

Jesus knows in all times what those words are we need. Sometimes, lots of the times, we get those words from the fathers God gave us here on earth. "Sometimes you know what the right thing is to do, and you just do it." Surely, in this place, we know what those words mean! We're not really being our Lord's servants unless we go ahead and "Just do it."

"Always start at the top, and work your way down." Yeah! If we start with God – start at the top – in all that we do, then work our way down to where we are, we'll do a good job at whatever we do.

"Take it like a man." Or a woman – in other words, be adult about it, and a little bit dedicated, and know that whatever happens, you'll hear the encouraging words you need, and by the grace of God you'll get through.

"You've got to stand up for yourself!" And for everything you hold dear, and especially for the faith you have as a gift from God. If you and I are really Christians, then

we can't separate ourselves from God, because there is no separation anymore. So when we have to stand up for God, we're standing up for ourselves, too. See how God the Father's spirit gets to us through the spirit of our own earthly fathers?

And as I remember all these things, I remember the Fifth Commandment, "Honor your Father and your Mother," especially the last part, "so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you." God planned to speak through our fathers; that's how he'd make sure our "days will be long," which means they'll be good.

Well, there is no easy way to wrap up a sermon like this one. I suppose I've really stretched a metaphor here. And yet it's so appropriate, I think, on Mother's or Father's Day, to acknowledge that parents are a part of God's work, tools, if you will, for which we should be thankful. On this special day, as you visit with fathers, or as you celebrate with them, or as you remember fathers who have gone on to their reward, try to remember some of those "truths", those "traditions" that your fathers, or those who lived as your fathers, passed on to you. And as you do, look for where God was, or is, in that passing on. If you're like me, you'll hear the Spirit of your heavenly Father, speaking through the spirit of your earthly father, and then you'll know how thoroughly you have always been - and always will be - loved.

*Let us pray: O God, in your infinite wisdom, you arrange for many ways to speak to us. You have spoken from clouds, from fire, from a burning bush, from a donkey's mouth, and even from a still small voice. You spoke to us through the words of Jesus of Nazareth, a man like us, but still, also, you. And in your Holy Spirit you have spoken to us through earthly fathers, who have prepared us to follow you. Lord, we ask your blessing on all through whom you speak, and ask also that you open our ears to hear. This we ask, in the name of Jesus our Lord, AMEN.*