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Sermon

June 20th, Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Rev 1:5-6 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Sunday is taken from the 17th chapter of Genesis, starting at verse 15:

God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai anymore, but her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and even give you a son by her. Yes, I will bless her, and she will be a mother of nations. Kings of many peoples will come from her.” ¹⁷ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to someone who is one hundred years old? Will Sarah, who is ninety years old, give birth?” ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, “Oh, let Ishmael live in your presence!” ¹⁹ But God said, “No, Sarah, your wife, will bear a son for you. You shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. ²⁰ “As for Ishmael, I have heard you. Yes, I have blessed him. I will make him fruitful and will multiply him very greatly. He will become the father of twelve chiefs, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear for you at this set time next year.” ²² When he finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

This is the Word of the LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

Since today is Father’s Day, I wanted to start out the sermon with a nice quote about Fathers. There are many nice ones out there. The one I liked the most was something that Mark Twain once said: “When I was fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have him around. When I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years.”

I was about 6 or 7 when someone at recess once said to me, “My dad could beat up your dad...” In the moment I greatly disputed that. It’s something that many children say. But it’s ridiculous. I didn’t know that kid’s dad and he didn’t know mine. So why was he so sure of that, and why was I so sure that he was dead wrong?

It was because of how we saw our fathers. Isn’t strange though how those opinions can change? When you’re young, your dad is the biggest and best. He’s the one who defines what masculinity is. Most children probably think what that boy thought. But

then most children when they grow up a bit more think more like Mr. Twain did. And then that opinion changes once again. The way that we view our fathers really depends on where we are in our lives.

We live in times when fathers are taken for granted or aren’t even necessary. Many fathers walk out. Or, there are families with 2 mothers, or 2 fathers. But this was not how God set up the family. It was meant to be a union between a man and a woman, a father and a mother. If there’s no father, that family will have challenges. Another quote I came across was one from Sigmund Freud: “I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father’s protection.” This was a man who thought that God was an illusion and religion should be set aside for reason and science. Even this man could see the great benefit of having a good father.

No matter what your family history is, whether you had a father growing up or not, whether you had a good relationship with him or not, your Father is the

best Father. "World's best dad!" How can I be so certain of this? Because we all have the same Father, the heavenly Father, THE LORD! A good father is giving, wise, and leads by example. Our heavenly Father is all these things and more! This Father's Day, let us first give thanks to our heavenly Father, the world's best dad! We pray: LORD, SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH, AMEN!

Our sermon text this morning takes up where last Sunday left off. Last Sunday we saw how God promised to make Abram a great nation and gave them the promised land. In the next chapter, Abram tried to help that promise along himself. His wife was barren. She heard what God had said to her husband. So, they figured it must be by another woman that this would be fulfilled. She gave him her maidservant, Hagar. Hagar conceived and would give birth to a son, named Ishmael.

Needless to say, this was not a great situation. Sarai resented Hagar, and Hagar despised her former mistress. Abram didn't stop Sarai from dealing with her harshly and she ran away. It took the LORD interceding to bring her back. It was a messy family situation.

But here God reissues the promise He had made to Abram, and this time His includes Sarai into the promise as well. ¹⁵ **God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai anymore, but her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and even give you a son by her. Yes, I will bless her, and she will be a mother of nations. Kings of many peoples will come from her."**

In last Sunday's sermon, I kept tripping up on the word "Abram". It's hard for me to say "Abram" and not to say "Abraham". In the preceding verses before our text, God changes Abram to Abraham. Abram means "exalted father". Abraham means "Father of many nations". God gave him a new name, one that would always remind him of the promise made to him.

And Sarai also gets a new name. No longer Sarai but Sarah. The difference between these names is

disputed. Sarai means princess. It is theorized the Sarah means "my princess". God gave her a new name to signify her part that she would play in this new covenant. Both of their new names now featured an "H", and letter of God's own name YHWY. God gave them new names that reflected what He was about to give them, and names that reflected their connection to Him forever.

Fathers are giving. Many Fathers are the provider in the family. This is not always the case. Many Fathers stay at home. But a father does not just give by earning money. He gives his time to his children, and this is just as valuable if not more so.

What has your father given you? Maybe you can think of something specific. Maybe you can't. Maybe he gave you so much over the years that it's really hard to narrow it down.

When it comes to your heavenly Father, He is the definition of giving. Jesus made this point abundantly clear: **"Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 "Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! (Mat 7:9-11 NKJ)**

God gives us everything. Think about that. Everything we have we have been given from His good and gracious hand. We like to think that we have what we've earned. But God gave us the talent, the opportunity, the prosperous country. God gave us a family. God gives us everything. **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (Jam 1:17 NKJ)**

Just look at what God promises to give to Abraham here. He promises a son to him and to Sarah his wife. Even though they were old, they would be blessed and conceive. These promises would be how the other promises would come about. He also promises them royalty. Kings of many people would come out of Sarah. This was a royal blessing.

It is customary that on Father's Day, we give our dads gifts. They often fail to convey the gratitude we feel. What is a set of golf clubs compared to the gifts your father has given you throughout your entire life? But what gift could we ever give to our heavenly Father? There's nothing we can give to Him that He hasn't given to you in the first place!

That's the thing about the gifts of God. They keep on giving. This blessing of a baby boy would indeed produce a great nation, one of which another baby boy would be born into. Jesus! While the descendants of Abraham and Sarah would indeed produce many kings, this King would be different, better. The King of Kings, the King of the Jews, Jesus Christ. He was the greatest gift ever given to mankind. He would give us the gift of His blood, the gift of salvation.

A father is not just revered because he gives. They give us something that is more valuable than anything physical. They train us. They raise us. We learn from them. They teach us how to live. This is the father's greatest charge and his most momentous gift. Scripture says **Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it (Pro 22:6 NKJ)**

A good father is wise. But Abraham, the Father of many nations, has an unwise reaction here. ¹⁷ **Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to someone who is one hundred years old? Will Sarah, who is ninety years old, give birth?"** ¹⁸ **And Abraham said to God, "Oh, let Ishmael live in your presence!"** ¹⁹ **But God said, "No, Sarah, your wife, will bear a son for you. You shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.**

Not only did God rename Sarah and Abraham, but He also gives their son his name. Isaac. Isaac means laughter, or "he laughs". Often this gets attributed to Sarah, who in the next chapter when she hears that she would become pregnant, dismissingly laughed. This displeased Him. The LORD asked Abraham why

she had laughed and said **"Is anything too hard for the LORD? (Gen 18:14 NKJ)**

But Sarah was not alone in her laughter. Abraham also laughed. Here it says that **Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart** Sometimes we can't help but laugh. The promise was laughable. Who gives birth at 90? Laughing isn't inappropriate in and of itself. There's a time for it. But there is most certainly times not to. Like when the LORD promises you an heir. This wasn't a joke. This was a gracious and glorious promise.

We don't exactly know how that laughing was done. Was it done out of joy or doubt? We don't know exactly. But what was truly laughable was that after this son is promised, Abraham once again puts forth the disaster of a plan that he came up with: **And Abraham said to God, "Oh, let Ishmael live in your presence!"**

No doubt, Abraham loved his son Ishmael. Even though he wasn't by Sarah, he was still Abraham's son. Abraham wanted to help along this promise of God, and Ishmael was the result. But God's promises don't need our help. We often get in the way and mess it up. For instance, JUSTIFICATION. God tells you that your entire sins are forgiven by the blood of Jesus. Just an awesome and incredible promise and gift. And then we go and think that we somehow need to add to that by attempting good deeds. Or, God tells you that the bread and wine is the body and blood of Jesus given into death for your sins. Again, an awesome and incredible promise. And then we go and overthink it and try to explain it rationally. Let the Word of God stand! It doesn't need your help, you need it's!

It was only natural that Abraham would be concerned about Ishmael. And the LORD would bless him. His descendants would also be great. He would be the Father of 12 chiefs. He would be blessed. But the world would not be blessed through him. That blessing would be found through the covenant that God made to Abraham and Sarah's son. It was through the wisdom of the LORD that salvation would come to mankind. That wise plan of salvation would

be through the miraculous means of an old couple giving birth.

Not only is our Father giving and wise, He also leads us. He leads us by His Word and promises, and He leads us by His example. ²¹ **But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear for you at this set time next year.** ²² **When he finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.**

To all the fathers out there, what is your proudest moment as a father? A hard question to answer. Maybe it is when your son graduates from High School. Maybe it is when you walk your daughter down the aisle at her wedding. There are many events and milestones in our children's lives that provoke a godly sense of pride in us as fathers.

For me, it has been the moments when one of my children came into this world. They say that there is no pain quite like childbirth. But fathers also suffer at this time as well. I can just feel the eyes of my wife rolling when I say things like this. Obviously, I did not suffer the same pain as my wife did when she was in labor. I am not making that claim. But it's not easy to sit next to someone you love and watch them suffer. Husbands tend to like to be able to do things, fix things, and do something to help out. But there really isn't anything you can do to help your wife during labor. All you can do is be encouraging and supportive. Personally, it was hard for me to be in the hospital and watch my wife suffer while our children were being born...

Perhaps that is also part of the reason that Abraham brings up Ishmael. Pregnancy becomes more precarious the older you are. The term "geriatric pregnancy" applies to any woman who gives birth after her 35th year. It's really an insulting term. But think about Sarah! She was 89 for crying out loud! You can see why this provoked laughter. How hard would that labor be? But the LORD was with them, He would get them through it, and He would bring about the salvation of the world through that birth.

All good fathers are leaders. That is part of the job. As you become a husband, you become the head of your family. That's not to say you call all the shots. Rather, you oversee the spiritual welfare of everyone else in your family. You are to instruct them in the ways of the LORD. You do that by bringing them to church, family devotions, and being active in their Christian education. This is a lifelong endeavor.

The problem is that all fathers are sinful. We fail at being fathers just like we fail at being husbands and sons. We try to set a good example and reflect Christ to our children. But we come up incredibly short. But it's all right. Why? Because we have the world's best dad! GOD the FATHER!!!

God is the ultimate leader. He leads us from the moment we come into this world. He gives us His Word. It instructs us in the way we should go. He gives us His great love. That means Law and Gospel. He gives us the structure of His Law which tells us what to do and what not to do. Then we, as stupid and sinful humans disobey Him. Then He leads us to repentance. It's not something that we do by ourselves, rather it is a divine act. After He leads us to repent of our sins, He shows us His love.

That love is on display in all of scripture. Jesus lived a perfect life of love, service, and sacrifice. He is the ultimate example of how to live and love. We try to follow Him. And we fail. Then we see Him dying for us on the cross. Then we see Him defeating death for us on Easter morning. We have hope and life in the covenant God gave Abraham here. It is fulfilled by Jesus Christ, and it is our glorious promise and gift today.

"My dad could beat up your dad..." It's a claim that many children make. But it is based out of how they view their fathers. It's a claim that the man in their lives is strong. But beating up another person really isn't a display of strength. It's just a foolish childhood notion. The real show of strength is not in physical prowess. True strength is revealed in love.

We all view our fathers in different ways depending on where we are in our lives. The longer you are around your father, the larger chance there is that you start to see him in a lesser light. This is natural because this the reality of mankind. Maybe there comes a day when all of a sudden you can beat the old man in something you never could before. The illusion that dad is superman eventually falls away.

But not with the heavenly Father. There is never a moment where He becomes inferior. The more we know about Him, the more impressive and stronger He is. We have no right to be in His presence, let alone to be His children. But a blessed baby made that possible. It was Isaac to whom the LORD would establish His holy covenant with mankind. It was Jesus Christ who would become the fulfillment of that promise. He would die so that we could live. Now we are God holy Children, adopted in the blood of Christ, and can call upon our Father for anything!

Our Father is giving. **He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Rom 8:32 NKJ)** Our Father is wise. **Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! (Rom 11:33 NKJ)** Our Father leads us here on earth and leads us to heaven. **Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths. 5 Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; (Psa 25:4-5 NKJ)** In God the Father, we have the world's best dad. Our Father loves us, sustains us, and gives us eternal life. It Him alone be praise! AMEN!!!