

Matthew 13:53-57a  
Image of the Father  
Sunday December 3, 2017

Today begins a series of 5 teachings on Joseph the forgotten man in the Christmas story. Most of the focus at the Christmas season has always been on Mary the mother of Jesus. This series is based on a book by Rev. Adam Hamilton called “Faithful Christmas through the eyes of Joseph.”



I found it a fascinating little book that gave me a deeper understanding of God and our role as Fathers, Grandfathers, Stepfathers; Men as mentors and role models for children and youth developing a positive image of God.

Now there is not a lot about Joseph in the Bible and most of what we know of Joseph we find in the Gospel of Matthew. He is not mentioned in Acts or any of the Epistles. There are only 16 verses in the New Testament that mention him by name. So most of what we know about Joseph we have to infer and look between the lines and mostly find by looking at his son Jesus' life and teachings. The idea we are working from is similar to that old saying, “Like father like son.” In this case the Son reveals his earthly as well as his heavenly Father.

Joseph is Jesus adoptive father, as our confession of faith says, “Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary.” We believe that God is Jesus “Father” through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Now if you have a problem believing that Jesus was born of a virgin you are not the first. Joseph was the first and we will get into that in the coming weeks.

But in Joseph and Jesus' day when a man gave a child a name he became that child's father. That's how they did adoption in Jesus' day. So when Joseph said, “His name is Jesus”, which means “The LORD saves”. Jesus became Joseph's adoptive son, which is how he carried on in line of David and fulfilled that prophecy.

Now the dearth of information about Jesus and his family life as a child led to much speculation. People, starting in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, tried to fill in the blanks of Jesus' life from birth to 12 and from 12 to 30 and that included Joseph's life. Around 150AD several "Apocryphal" gospels were written the most important one concerning the Joseph is called "The Gospel of James". It is of course not included in the Bible for many reasons the foremost of which is it is claimed to have been written by James the brother of Jesus who had been dead for 100 years.

In it Joseph is portrayed as an elderly widow (90 years old by another document) who was to be married to Mary "with the intention that she be cared for by her husband as a father might care for his daughter or a grandfather for his granddaughter." P.15. Joseph was portrayed as never consummating his marriage to Mary and thus she stayed a perpetual virgin. The idea Mary was a perpetual virgin is extra-biblical, but it caught on in the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic Church. Even Martin Luther as well as most of the Protestant reformers including John Wesley believed this.

According to this idea Jesus' brothers and sisters were step brothers and sisters the product of Joseph's first marriage or they were his cousins. This is why in many depictions of Joseph he is portrayed as an elderly man. Here are a couple of famous painting that depicting this. Here is one by Guido Reni 1635



Here is one by Giovanni Battista around 1670-85AD.



It is also why in some Nativity sets Joseph is modeled as an old man. Take a look at your Nativity set and see what age of the man is depicted there.

Now most Protestants today envision Joseph as a young virile man.



In the end though the age of Joseph does not matter, what matters is what he did for Jesus. **“He protected him, provided for him, taught, and mentored him.”** Page 11. Joseph was a living breathing man who modeled for Jesus who God the Father was. He in many ways was the **“Image of the Father.”**

Jesus brought something brand new to the religious vocabulary when he referred to God as Father. In fact he used an intimate term to refer to God as Father. He called him “Abba” very close to us calling our fathers “dad” or “daddy”. It wasn’t a term of “sexism” or “patriarchy”, but a term of endearment, intimacy of relationship. It was used to evoke the ideas and emotions of protection, love and providence. It allowed us to even dare to call God our Father our Daddy every time we pray as in “Our Father in heaven...”

**Joseph, I believe, modeled for Jesus grace, accountability, forgiveness, and honesty.** Where did Jesus get the idea of God running after a prodigal son full of grace and forgiveness? Did Jesus see one of his brothers stray and return to their father’s loving arms? Perhaps.

And a little Greek lesson here. Jesus and his dad are referred to in Greek as a **“Tekton”** a carpenter. They are not referred to as **“architektons”** or master builders. They were the common carpenters who built furniture, chests, tables, and farm implements like yokes for oxen.

And thus we get the beautiful verse Mt. 11:28-30, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”**

God did not pick from a family of “Architektons”, or priests, or kings to find a father to raise his son. He picked Joseph a common ordinary carpenter, because he knew Joseph’s heart and faithfulness. Joseph had a heart after God’s own heart, like King David in the Old Testament.

In our Matthew reading today we see Jesus dismissed in his own home town synagogue as “the son of the carpenter”. Vocations in his day were handed down in the family and they knew he wasn’t the son of a priest or prophet or royalty so how dare he speak to them the way he did. He so incised them they tried to through him off a cliff and kill him as it says in Luke 4:28.

Now we as Dads and Moms are the image of God to our children. For most it is a good image and draws us closer to God, but for some it is an image that must be overcome. My friend Michael Brunk did this. Both his bio-father and step-father weren’t much in terms of fathers and manhood and their example and behavior were ones he had to overcome to be a father and grasp God as Father. But in most cases we have had good fathers and they are very important to our lives.

Did you know if a father goes to church his children are 7 times more likely to go to church and carry on the faith? New York University psychologist Paul Vitz in his works, “listed many noted atheists who had difficult relationships with their father, writing, “Disappointment in and resentment of his own father unconsciously justifies his rejection of God.” Page 29

I once watched a tragic video about elephant management gone bad in Africa. They had too many elephants in one area and not enough big equipment to move the adult elephants; so they killed the adults, captured the young ones and moved them to a new area thinking all would be fine as the young elephants grew up. It was a disaster.

They soon had juvenile delinquent elephants that were tearing up the jungle, each other and other animals. This tragic situation was only reconciled when they got large enough equipment to move some adult male elephants to the area to adopt these delinquents, teach them how to behave and then things settled down.

A famous politician said this, “We know the statistics – that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of schools and 20 times more likely to end up in prison.

They are more likely to have behavioral problems, or run away from home or become teenage parents themselves. And the foundations of our community are weaker because of it.” President Obama Father’s Day speech 2008

Children need fathers and father figures. Men you are very important to the future of our country and our church. You don’t have to say much, but you need to live like you believe. You need to spend time with the young people in your lives. And the older I get the older the young people in my life seem to be.

There is an age at which young people don’t listen too much of what we say, but they are always watching, and then they reach an age when they ask us our advice and wish they had our wisdom. It is hard to be patient and wait for that day, but it usually will come.

In my life my dad was a very quiet man even up to this day. When I visit my folks my mom does 99% of the talking, but she has always been the talker, the extrovert, my dad the introvert. She is the preacher as I say I learned how to preach by being preached to.

My dad has always been the listener and doer. He has always had a different, or some would say strange sense of humor that I and my son have inherited.



As you can see from this picture the apple hasn’t fallen far from the tree. My dad lived his faith in front of us, always in church, always loving us and my mom. Never said much, but he was always there.

His quiet example allowed me to be a father figure for many young people through the years I was a youth pastor. Towards the end of my career as a youth pastor they started calling me “Father Fred”. At first I thought it was because I was their pastor; but then it dawned on me one day there was more to that term of endearment than I first thought, so many lacked fathers.

My friends, fathers, grandfathers, stepfathers, men there are young people out there watching you for your example of grace, love and forgiveness, may you become aware of it and be as faithful in your example as Joseph.

More on Joseph and his example next week and the weeks to come.

In Jesus’ name, amen.