

SERMON TITLE: "The Promise of the Father" (4th in Pentecost series)
SERMON TEXT: Acts 2:1-4, 14a, 22-24, 29-30, 32-39
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: June 21, 2020, at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

A couple weeks ago, I was at the grocery store looking for a birthday card for my brother. While I was there, I couldn't help but glance at the Father's Day cards too. Even though my dad died five years ago, there was something that drew me to look at the section of Father's Day cards from daughters. One in particular caught my eye so much that I bought it. It's the one I showed you in the Birthday Box.

I'm going to read to you what it says. On the outside, the card declares, "A Dad is a Daughter's Best Example." On the inside it says,

The most important man in my life taught me what matters most in this world—
To always do the right thing.
That your word is your word.
That your legacy reaches farther than you'll ever know . . .
He taught me that family comes first.
That anything worth having is worth working for.
And how important it is to come through for the people who count on you.
The most important man in my life showed me how to live.
I learned from the best, Dad, because I learned from you.
I love you on Father's Day and always.

I miss my dad, and I will love him always. He wasn't a perfect man. Of course not; he was human. But he was a man of his word, reliable and honest, who always delivered on his promises.

Today is the fourth of five Sundays in which we are taking a deep dive into what happened on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two. So far, we've encountered the Holy Spirit in the fires of Pentecost, in the winds of change, and in the power of diversity. Today, on this Father's Day, we move along in this story a little farther and discover the Holy Spirit in the promise of the Father.

1—THE PROMISE FROM GOD THE FATHER TO JESUS THE SON

We begin, first of all, with the affirmation that the Holy Spirit came as a promise from God the Father to Jesus the Son. In Acts 2:33, Peter preached that Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on his

followers gathered there in Jerusalem. But, before he did that, Jesus was first exalted to the right hand of God where he received the promise of the Holy Spirit from God his Father.

God's outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Jesus was a powerful act that fulfilled a powerful promise. Can you imagine how Jesus would have arrived in heaven--after having been beaten, ridiculed, crucified, and buried? Resurrection turned out to be amazingly wonderful, but Jesus suffered a lot to get there. And who knows what kind of shape Jesus was in by the time of his Ascension 40 days after his resurrection? Just think of anytime you've been through the wringer with really serious health problems, financial bankruptcy, or a broken relationship. Think how it was if you got fired from a job, were subjected to horrific violence, were falsely accused of some immorality, or experienced extreme self-doubt. Then imagine what it took to get over that. Or maybe you still haven't recovered from it. Maybe you still are in need of that healing spirit.

Well, Jesus got the relief he needed when God raised him up, exalted him, and declared him both Lord and Messiah. And the promised Holy Spirit was the salve that healed his wounds and the salvation that vindicated his spirit.

Many years ago, I learned a song about the Holy Spirit that goes like this:

The Comforter has come, the Comforter has come.
The Holy Ghost from heaven, the Father's promise given.
Now spread the tidings round, wherever man is found.
The Comforter has come.

The disciples of Jesus had experienced the Holy Spirit in flames, wind, and diversity of languages and people. And that's how they knew that their savior and Lord Jesus had received that comfort and affirmation that he needed. The outpouring of Spirit had come upon them because the Holy Spirit came first as a powerful fulfillment of a promise from God the Father to Jesus the faithful Son.

2--GOD'S PROMISE FOR FATHERS

Of course, the Holy Spirit wasn't just a promise for Jesus. In Peter's sermon, he indicated that the promise of the Father was also a promise for the all the men of Israel. Being a woman, I usually

chafe a bit at scriptures that seem too male-oriented or too male-dominated. Personally, I prefer Acts 2:17-18, where daughters and women are mentioned as recipients of the Holy Spirit. But since today is Father's Day, and since we know the patriarchy of 2000 years ago, let's go along with these verses that paint the scenario of Peter, flanked by other male apostles, directing his message to his "fellow Israelites." As verse 37 implies, this was a crowd of "brothers." By and large, what we have here is men talking to men. And, quite certainly, most of them would have had families. So, in other words, the Holy Spirit from God was being offered and promised to fathers.

Now, before you guys get too giddy, I want you to realize that there were some strings attached to this promise. When the crowd of fathers asked the "brothers" what they should do, Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven; and [then] you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Peter was specific when he talked about the sin that these Israelites had committed. They had killed Jesus. Wow, that's a lot to repent for, don't you think?

And maybe that word *repentance* all by itself conjures up ideas in your head. Maybe it doesn't take you but a few seconds or a few minutes to come up with one or more behaviors, attitudes, or ways of thinking that could use some refinement or major improvements in your life. But, in case you're having trouble imagining a fault or failing, the world around us is certainly giving some loud hints that implicate us all in systemic racism and implicit bias that's killing African Americans by shootings, strangulations, and lynchings.

Peter tells the men in his audience to repent and be baptized. In the United Methodist Church, when we are baptized ourselves or when we choose to baptize our children, the questions we answer are these: "Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin? Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?" When we repent of our part in racism, and accept God's power to overcome it in our own hearts and in our society, then the baptismal power of

the Holy Spirit will come upon us. Then that Holy Spirit of promise will be fulfilled in our lives. Of course, this message is for all of us. But today, Dads, this message is especially for you.

3—THE PROMISE FOR YOUR CHILDREN

If you think I'm pushing you fathers a bit hard, please know that I'm doing it for a reason. In verse 39, Peter told that group of men that this promise of the Holy Spirit which had come to Jesus and was available to them, was also a promise for their children. You know, sometimes if we think something is just about us, we figure we can just tough our way through. We can just live with our rough edges and deal with the consequences. But when we think about our children and grandchildren, and the influence we have on them, sometimes that makes a positive motivational difference. Some of us have actually known fathers to change their ways because their children asked them, pestered them, and downright shamed them into behavior changes. Some dads have quit smoking. Some have quit drinking. Some have stopped or at least decreased their swearing. Because of their obvious influence on their children, some fathers have stopped stealing, using drugs, or having affairs. Some dads, like mine, eventually even started going to church.

I've told you how much I loved my dad and still do. My dad was a good man in many ways, even before he repented of his sins and gave his heart to Christ. But, in those earlier years, he also had some strange racist ideas. When I was about to go on a high school trip back east, my dad gave me a really weird lecture about what to do if I happened to be walking on a sidewalk and a black person came along. He told me to be sure and stay on the sidewalk and make the black person step down into the street. He also told me that if I married a black man, I would have polka-dotted or striped children. Why would my dear father say such cruel and bizarre things? Because he was prejudiced. Yes, that was in the 1970s, when we were all less enlightened. But earlier, my dad had been a law enforcement officer on the Montana State Highway Patrol and with the Lincoln County Sheriff's Department, during those years of the Civil Rights movement when black people were being killed often. And, sadly, black

people are still being killed far too often today—and sometimes by men and fathers who otherwise seem to be very upright and decent citizens.

For our children to live in a better world where the promise of the Holy Spirit can be realized, the promise has to be for everyone. In Acts 2:39, Peter preached that “the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” That means the promise of the Holy Spirit isn’t just for our own households of white privilege, but for those other children of God too.

CONCLUSION

In the Annual Conference meetings that we had on Friday and Saturday, African American pastors were given time to speak and draw attention to the needs for change. Rev. Aaron Gray, who once was an intern for our Ogden First United Methodist Church, made a motion that a black person be added to a leadership committee. Rev. Eric Smith, another African American pastor, made a motion that we find a way for our conference budget to support historically black colleges and universities. A video that included two African American bishops called all of us to get involved in “dismantling racism.” And another black pastor named Rev. King Harris called on us not to shy away from naming what is wrong. “Like South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” he challenged us to accept that, “before you can fix what’s wrong, you have to acknowledge what is wrong . . . Now is the time,” he said. “This is the place, and you are the people.”

Just like we promise in our baptismal vows, it’s time “to repent of [our] sin” and “to accept the freedom and power God gives [us] to resist evil, injustice, and oppression.” The promise of the Father is that the Holy Spirit will give us that freedom and power.