

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
February 21, 2018

In the Midst of Temptation, Family Matters

John 8:42-47

Does “family matter”? I wish that “family” would bring warm fuzzies to ALL of our hearts and minds...but my guess is that the reality of sin in our world has jaded some of us a bit so that “family” has its challenges. I am sorry for that. But I think we would all agree that even “family having its challenges” is PROOF that in this life “family matters”!

I think of little Kim Miller, a 4th grader in South Dakota in 1973. She would wait after school on the steps of church for her dad to pick her up. Usually he was on time. I just remember one fall day when it was cold outside and getting dark and there was Kim sitting on the bottom step of church waiting for her dad. We brought her into our house that night until dad showed up. She was glad for the company and the warmth, but you could tell it did not fill the “loss” of waiting for dad out in the cold. You see, family matters.

I think of my own daughter, 35 years later, waiting for her dad at Wisco after musical rehearsal on a cold winter's night. I was the dad and I love my daughter, but I had had a long day and I was caught up in my own world, and I was three-fourths of the way home that night before a phone call from my wife jarred me into the reality that I had pulled a “Kim Miller” and forgotten my kid! Thankfully not out in the cold, but waiting for a dad who didn't arrive. To this day I get teary. You see, family matters.

My Uncle David went home to heaven last August. He was my boyhood hero, my dear adulthood friend. Together we loved our Jesus, sang his praises, shared his wisdom. We talked alfalfa and soybeans and the number of turkeys and deer we'd seen in our travels. He was a truck driver; I was a pastor—it worked! And I miss what family gives. You see, in this life, family matters.

This Lenten season, we are focusing in on temptation—its source, its causes and its remedy in Jesus. And guess what, Jesus wants us to know that “IN THE MIDST OF TEMPTATION, FAMILY MATTERS.” Imagine that!

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.” (John 8:42-47)

IN THE MIDST OF TEMPTATION, FAMILY MATTERS.

Do You Trust Your Heavenly Father?

Do You Know the Heart of the Alternative Father?

1. DO YOU TRUST YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER?

A. He’s All About Love

Do you trust your heavenly Father? Trust in a father has a lot to do with “family matters”. Our adoptive Father has a pretty cool heart! It is all about love, and it is all about you...and me! The Bible says, “God IS Love!” Think about that! You or I might say about someone that he or she is “such a loving person”, but the Bible says our Father IS love! Love SO permeates and fills his being that he determined in eternity to create us to share his love. And when he saw that we would sin, rebel against him and bring death upon ourselves, his love did not crumple us up in the canvass of his proposed creation, his love determined to send a Savior—his own Son!

Can you and I trust a God like that who would put us ahead of himself to take care of our sin problem and to achieve for us eternal life? Can you and I trust a Father who put in the time to love us?

When I was growing up, one of the most precious times of the day was suppertime and family devotions. We ate all of our evening meals together and we typically had a dessert of the Word of God. Our parents would encourage conversations about life and about God and about our place in that mix. And we most certainly learned the love of our heavenly Father—that we could

trust his heart to bless because he had sent his Son to die! And somehow, in the midst of temptations, that family connection has mattered.

B. He Has a Tender Voice

For you see, in the midst of temptation, it is critical to know that the Father's loving heart translates into a tender voice! Our parents helped us HEAR that heart!

Do you ever wonder how the LORD God SOUNDED in the garden in the cool of the day when we fell into sin? "Adam, where are you?" In Genesis 3, we HEAR a loving parent at work, and I trust that even when I fall into sin and the Father's voice is needed in my life through my wife, my children, a friend, the Father's voice will be tender even as it needs to call me out: "Nathan, where are you? What are you doing? What have you done? Have you eaten of the tree/have you taken from what I have forbidden for your good?"

For you see, in the midst of temptation, when I have fallen, temptation is still THICK in the air! Temptation to lie through my teeth, to throw anybody and everybody under the bus rather than fess up! Fear when caught red-handed can blind us to the love of our Father's heart and cause us to miss the tenderness in his voice! Jesus says, "Whoever belongs to God HEARS what God says. If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come from God"—and you know the Father's heart. God IS Love.

APPLICATION I will never forget the night when the policeman came up behind us with his flashlight through the trees. I was 12. The scene? Watertown, Wisconsin. Water tower hill. I was with five other young men of God in the middle of the night. We were supposed to be camping in the backyard but instead we were listening to the voice of a different father. More on him in a moment! We were having "fun" at other's expense and the officer had us dead to rights. And he knew it. I will never forget my fear and my sinful nature trying to squirm out of our situation! The officer could have taught us a major lesson and hustled us to his squad car, called our parents...but instead, he let us squirm, he talked to us, and he sent us back to our tents with an admonition to behave. My parents still don't know, unless God has told them now in heaven!

To this day I wonder if that wise officer was a Christian because NOW I hear the voice of my Father, "Nathan, Martin, John, Mike, Hans...what are you doing?"

2. DO YOU KNOW THE HEART OF THE ALTERNATIVE FATHER?

A. Know the Devil's Game

Why DOES the heart of our Heavenly Father step into our lives, and why is there a tenderness to his voice even in his anger with his children? Why is it that in the end we will truly come to appreciate how “family matters” in the midst of temptation?

Well, do you realize that everyone on the planet has only one of two, spiritual fathers? Either the Almighty God is your father, or the devil himself is your father. And there is no in between! So, just as we know the heart of our Heavenly Father, it is important for us to recognize the heart of the father of darkness and his M.O., HOW he always operates and TO what end!

“The devil was a murderer from the beginning...NOT holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. He is a liar and the father of lying.”

The devil's end game is simple: he wants you dead eternally, separated from God forever right along with him! And he will stop at nothing to get you dead forever! So, in the midst of temptation, it is important to understand family connections and how the devil and his children operate, ignoring the heart and voice of God. Of the satanic family Jesus says, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires”...that lead to the spiritual death of people!

B. Know the Devil's M.O

How DOES the devil operate, so that we can be AWARE and so that we can SEE? Well, he IS predictable! Let us look to the evidence in the garden and take notes before we head back out into the midst of temptation.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. My friends, the devil always disguises himself as something that might be OK for us. The Hebrew really says that the serpent was the most gifted of God's creatures. “Maybe snakes talk?” I can hear Eve thinking in the newness of her world.

The serpent said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” My friends, the devil always seeks to create doubt in our minds as to what exactly is the will of God as he tries to squeeze his way into our hearts!

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. My friends, the devil always seeks to disagree with our Heavenly Father to get us to question the love of our God in our lives!

“For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” My friends, the devil always seeks to deceive by working “his magic” with half-truths—just enough plausible truth to get us to BITE! But remember HIS heart! He cares NOT for truth! He is a murderer!

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Let us not be blind, my brothers and sisters, to the devil’s tactics, for they NEVER change! He always works to create desire in us that is contrary to God-pleasing desire, and that thinks WE know better how to use the blessings of the Creator!

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves...And they hid from the sound of the LORD God in the garden...”Adam where are you?” Do you know what will be the greatest joy of heaven? Living without fear of God and without fear concerning sin! For you see, the father of lies and the murderer of mankind ONLY HAS ONE GOAL and that is to destroy us. And THAT happens through sin. The devil is angry that Jesus died for our sins and has restored us to the family of God! So, since that day in the garden, his goal is to tempt us to change our allegiance as God’s children, to give up on the family of God, to trust in a different father and to listen to a different voice!

But let us never forget that the heart and the voice of the father from hell ALWAYS comes with a trailing hook! No matter how tempting, how beautiful, how awesome the prize...the hook is always the same. Jesus told the Jews, “Whoever sins is a slave to sin.” If sin is who we are, then God is who we are NOT, and the devil gleefully reels us in on a barbed hook we cannot shake!

APPLICATION Now, my friends, let us not be deceived by the devil’s biggest lie. He holds in his war chest a weapon to use when the time is right, that somehow the sin of a child of God who KNOWS better, who KNEW the commandment and broke it anyway, that that sin is TOO

big for our God to forgive—outside of the reach of the Father’s love! IS there no hope for the child of God caught in sin? IS there no shaking of that barbed hook as the devil is reeling us to a different home?

Our Jesus came into this world knowing full well the evil heart and the lies and the deceit of Satan. And so he went to the cross and he paid for our sin; and not some of our sin, but ALL of our sin! And HE has declared that “Whoever believes in me will not perish but HAS eternal life.”

And our Jesus KNEW the hook would come! “Your sin is too big THIS time for your Father to forgive. He has lost patience with you! You are mine!” Prior to our text, Jesus also made this amazing promise: “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. But if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!”

CONCLUSION Dear friends, you and I on our own cannot shake the hook of the devil’s temptations, but our Jesus did—for you and for me! “It is finished!” cut the line. “The tomb is empty; he is not here,” is on the family crest. Forgiveness is how this FAMILY ROLLS, and in the midst of temptation, FAMILY MATTERS! You gotta love that about this family!

Our Jesus will come for us—and he will not be late! Our Jesus will never forget us, no matter how deep the hook is embedded. And our Jesus will always lead with his heart of love. For that is the nature of our Father in heaven. 😊 Amen.

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