

“Seasons of a Man’s Life”
Ephesians 6:1-4
Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
June 21, 2020

READ the text: Ephesians 6:1-4

The story goes that Moses and Jesus were in a threesome playing golf one day. Moses stepped up to the tee and slammed a long drive. His ball landed in the fairway, but rolled directly toward a water hazard. Quickly, Moses raised his club, the water parted, and the ball rolled to the other shore, safe and sound. Jesus strolled up to the tee, and hit an even longer drive, but again directly toward the water hazard. His ball landed in the center of the pond and kind of hovered over the water. Jesus casually walked out on the water and chipped the ball onto the green. The third guy got up and randomly whacked the ball off the tee. It headed over the fence and into oncoming traffic on a nearby street. It bounced off a truck and hit a nearby tree. From there it bounced onto the roof of a shack close by and rolled into the gutter, down the drain spout, out onto the fairway and straight toward the same water hazard. While rolling on its way to the pond, the ball hit a stone and bounced out over the water onto a lily pad, where it rested quietly. Suddenly a large bullfrog jumped up onto the lily pad and snatched the ball into its mouth. Just then, an eagle swooped down, grabbed the frog and flew away. As the eagle flew over the green, the frog squealed with fright and dropped the ball, which bounced into the cup for a hole in one!

Moses, visibly frustrated, complained to Jesus: “I hate playing with your Dad.”

I thought you might enjoy the story of that ultimate golf game on Father’s Day, as a reminder that all of us, from tee to green, have the same “Dad”, or, as it were, the same “Mom”. All of us are children in the family of the One Parent who blessed us with the gift of Life.

To our knowledge, the Apostle Paul was not a father. The context of his family experience is what he learned as a youngster growing up in a Jewish household, with privileges of Roman citizenship, in the university town of Tarsus, in what is present day Turkey. I have mentioned to you that, thanks to my friend Ahmet Uyan, who lives in Tarsus, I have visited the home where Paul was ostensibly raised. Paul, the converted Christian, applied what he had personally known when he advised early church families how to structure themselves, as in his letter to the Ephesians: *“Children, it is in your Christian duty to obey your parents...so that all may go well with you...Parents, do not treat your children in such a way as to make them angry. Instead, raise them with Christian discipline and instruction.”* Remember that Paul’s society was a patriarchal society. Yet he envisions a social structure that is less patriarchal and more co-equal. In particular, he uses the household imagery to talk about how the church—God’s ideal society—is supposed to operate. Followers of Christ are co-equals with one another.

In my household, there is a standing appointment on Thursday evenings to watch the new television drama entitled “The Council of Dads”. The saga is about a mother raising five bio and adopted kids, who are diverse in race and sexual orientation. Their father died of cancer, but before doing so, he asked three friends to serve as surrogates in what he called “The Council of Dads”. Each episode initiates or continues two or three storylines, and this past week that included the oldest daughter reassuring one of the three surrogates that, while he may not have raised her as a father, no matter what happens, he will always be one of her “dads”.

That understanding on her part is a helpful reminder for all men on Father’s Day. Would that all of us would accept the responsibility, and the joy, of being “dads” for the children of the world. Sort of like “The Council of Dads”!

The “Outlook” section of Sunday’s Washington Post usually deconstructs “Five Myths” about a pertinent subject, and three years ago this weekend the subject was “Fatherhood”. “Myth No. 3” that

the writer Paul Raeburn countered is the idea that “fathers are dispensable” Influences on children, compared to the essential influences of mothers. Raeburn says *“Children whose fathers play with them, read to them, take them on outings and help care for them have been shown to have bigger IQs, fewer behavioral problems in the early school years, and less likelihood of delinquency or criminal behavior as adolescents. Children with involved fathers are less likely to smoke and less likely to suffer from depression or other psychiatric ailments years later...When dads used more words with preschool children during play, the children had more advanced language skills a year afterward. That is likely to lead to increased success in school later on.”*

Sounds like a confirmation of the Apostle Paul’s concept of the ideal household. Would that all of us would accept the responsibility, and the joy, of being “dads” for the children of the world. Sort of like “The Council of Dads”!

In preparing for a Father’s Day message, I pulled from my library a book by Daniel Levinson entitled “The Seasons of a Man’s Life”. Levinson, on the Yale faculty at the time I was up the hill at the Divinity School, led a 10-year empirical study of the male life cycle that built upon the work of such luminaries as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Erik Erikson. As I reviewed the study’s conclusions about the psychology of adult development, I realized how relevant they are to the three living generations of males in my immediate family: My youngest son is 21, my elder sons are 48 and 50, and their dad will soon be 75. Levinson divides the seasons of a man’s life in a manner that is a virtual overlay of our circumstance. “Early adulthood” is a formative, “flowering” period of 15-20 years in which a young man enters the adult world with great energy and expectations, pursuing an occupation, and probably marrying. “Middle adulthood” becomes the strongest actualization of one’s capabilities, virtues, and contribution to society, despite some decline in youthful energy. “Late adulthood” inspires, according to Levinson, “a new relation to heaven”, that is, to life and death, characterized by a spiritual freedom that settles old conflicts between desire and morality, between society and self.

I observe these seasons in my sons! I recall passing through these seasons myself! I know that I am now experiencing “a new relation to heaven”!

But what of fatherhood? I am the only father among the four of us, though my sons are effective mentors to young boys in their social circles. Levinson offers insights worth contemplating: *“A man’s engagement in family life is often limited by his anxiety regarding the feminine in himself...Fatherhood was tremendously important for most of the men in our study. They were gratified when things went well at home, and they experienced great anxiety and guilt when family life was too limited or full of conflict.”* When a father achieves more balance between career and family, he gets more in touch with his feminine side, and more devoted to mentoring his kids.

That’s really the purpose behind the “Black Fathers Matter” motorcade that Chuck Hicks and Frank Malone will be leading this afternoon from the African American Civil War Museum in Northwest DC to Ballou High School in Southeast DC. The motorcade will celebrate the black men whose successes as fathers are not as often recognized as are their failures. Both Hicks and Malone head organizations that strive to improve the lives of young black men growing up in homes without a father, and help young fathers improve their parenting skills.

Would that all of us would accept the responsibility, and the joy, of being “dads” for the children of the world. Sort of like “The Council of Dads”!

For all of us are children in the family of the One Parent who blessed us with the gift of Life.

