



*A Few Good Men: A Father's Day Sermon  
Romans 12:1-5*

*June 16th, 2019 ~ Father's Day and Trinity Sunday  
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois  
The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.*

*Text: Since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (v.1)*

As many of you know, I invest about an hour each week as a study buddy at Thomas Jefferson. One of the things that most impressed me about First Federated Church when I read the Church Information Form was their involvement with the former Blaine-Summer elementary school below the hill and in one of the city's poorest and most violent neighborhoods.

My wife arrived in Peoria a couple of years before I did. She volunteered at Blaine-Summer, the school as part of this congregation's Reading Buddy program. She told me that some days the children could not go outside for recess not because of inclement weather but because of the sound of gunfire. I was impressed that a predominantly affluent congregation would reach out to the children in a very direct hands-on way in one of our city's poorest.

For a while, before she moved to Chicago for a new call, both Sue and I volunteered at Thomas Jefferson, the elementary school just down the street from us. One evening she shared a conversation she had that morning with two of her second graders. A third girl joined them that day because her volunteer was absent. As often happened, and still happens, Sue's students made "small talk" about their home life. On this particular occasion, the girls talked about their dads. None of the girls had a dad who lived in their household. As the conversation drew to a close, one of the girls commented about another classmate whose dad did live with them. With a wishful air of longing she said to the others, "Isn't she lucky?" They all nodded.

Dads, or at least a positive male role models, are important in a child's life. Like mothers, men bring a certain texture to a child's life, especially in the early years.

Here are some dad statistics:

- The United States Census Bureau notes that children with fathers in the home are less likely to live in poverty by a margin 44% to 12%;
- According to the Department of Education 43% more likely to receive A's in school if there is a dad around. They also have a larger vocabulary;
- Children with absentee fathers are more likely to abuse women and children, serve jail time, use drugs, and abuse alcohol.

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A couple of years ago, when a study reported that our city was one of the worst cities in the nation for African Americans, a conscious effort to cross the racial divide. City officials invited black and white clergy to meet, get to know one another, and work with one another to bridge the racial divide. One of

my biggest disappointments was that as the group looked for early “wins” I suggested that each church adopt the elementary school closest to their neighborhood and encourage the men in the congregation to invest 30 minutes to an hour each week in the school. They could read, help with homework, throw a monthly birthday party, attend a sporting event--anything. But, the group decided not to go this route. Rather, they were looking for bigger fish to fry. They wanted economic development opportunities. I can't help but wonder, though, if a positive male role model would have kept a 14 year old from shooting to death a 16 year to death in our city last week in a robbery attempt that went bad.

There is a lot of alienation in this world; insecurity, distrust and miscommunication. Our letter to the Romans says that at the root of this alienation is our alienation from God. Some think that God doesn't care, that God simply wound up the celestial clock and is not simply sitting back and watching it unwind. Others think that God doesn't like us; that God is angry with us and that somehow we have to win God's attention or approval. Sadly, all too often we project upon God our beliefs and prejudices. Our reading from the Letter to the Romans, though, tells us that none of this is true. God is not angry with us. We do not have to “win” God's acceptance. As the first letter of John says, “God is love”... “perfect love” ... a “love that casts out fear.”

In an earlier letter Paul wrote to the church community in Corinth that in Christ God reconciled the world to himself. Out of Love God forgave our sin and trespasses, completely wiping them away, blotting them out, and remembering them no more. What's more, God encourages us to do the same. We have been reconciled to God, Paul wrote, and we have been made ambassadors for Christ charged with the job of reconciliation. We need to be reconciled in our own broken relationships in order to reflect God reconciliation with us. This is at the very heart of what it means to be justified.

Too often we let the “perfect be the enemy of the good.” We want to plant a tree rather than sow the mustard seeds of God's Kingdom. Or, we comfort ourselves by saying that a problem or situation is so big that there is nothing that we can do about it. So we do nothing. This is simply not true. This is not gospel.

I close with an old story that many of you have heard before but it is worth retelling. Early one morning as the sun rose over the eastern horizon a man walked along a beach. Off in the distance he saw someone picking things off of the beach and tossing whatever it was into the ocean. As he drew closer he saw that the stranger was a little girl. As he drew closer and closer he saw that she was tossing starfish that had washed ashore at high tide and left behind as the tide receded. Amused at the futility of her effort he said, “You know, there are a lot of starfish on the beach. The job is too big for you to make a real difference.” The girl looked at the starfish in her hand and then tossed it as hard and as far as she could into the surf. Then she replied, “You may be right, Mister, but I made a difference to that starfish.”

Struck by her pluck, naiveté, wisdom, or all of the above, the man picked up a starfish and threw it back into the ocean. He picked up another, and another, and so it went until the girl tired. And you know, he didn't recall that last time that he felt so good.

I guess that what I'm saying is, that we need a few good men.

To God be the glory. Amen.