

Sermon on Ephesians 3:14-17

by Pastor Alexander Mielke on June 15, 2008

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Dear Congregation!

Today, on Father's Day, let us consider a few verses from Ephesians 3. The Apostle Paul writes:

14For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 16I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, 17and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

Following the German Luther Bible, the translation would be a bit different: "I bow my knees before God the Father, who is the true father for all who are called children in heaven and on earth."

Contemplating God's Fatherhood for all of us is a good way of celebrating Father's Day.

The idea of Father's Day is to say Thank You. Thank you, dad, for all we share together, playing and travelling, joy together, thank you for many years we've been on our way together, thank you for your work, your successes, but also the difficult times you struggle with, thank you for all your care and love!

I wish you and your family from all my heart that you can do it this way today, say this to your dad or husband at your home, or to grandpa maybe farther away.

Unfortunately, sometimes it isn't that easy.

I found a sentence by Guillermo Hernandez: "By the time we realize that our parents were right, we have children who think we're wrong." Relationships between parents and children, between fathers and sons and daughters aren't always easy. So Father's Day might provide an opportunity for saying: "I am sorry. Nevertheless I love you. Though there have been problems, I thank God for you." This the son or daughter can say. Or the dad or grandpa can say it. "Thank you" and "sorry" – for both Father's Day is a good opportunity.

Here's a joke having some truth in it.

Matt Slot and his wife brought their newborn son Adam to the pediatrician for his first checkup. "He's cute", the doctor said. "I bet you tell all the parents that!", Matt replied. "No", said the honest doctor. "I only say it about babies that are really good looking." "Well", said Matt, "what do you tell the other parents?" "I say, 'He looks just like you!'", said the doc.

Seems to be a pretty honest doctor. And this is a truth we often do not like to see. The problems we have with each other, with the father, or with the son or daughter, they are related to ourselves, because this is "bone of our bones" and "flesh of our flesh".

So a very good and a very necessary way of celebrating Father's Day is to remember our heavenly Father. Just as we are told in Ephesians 3:

"I bow my knees before God the Father, who is the true father for all who are called children in heaven and on earth."

First to thank God for everything we have been able to share within our family, for all the good we have been and given to each other.

And second to ask for God's guidance and help. For God knows our problems and God can give us strength for difficult ways.

There was a sign outside a church: "God's online – all knee-mails answered!" That's what Paul assures us too, as he writes: "I bow my knees before God the Father." If you undergo sorrows and problems, this is the first and best way: Bow your knees, kneel down before God the true Father! "God's online – all knee-mails answered!" God our heavenly Father will hear your kneel-prayers, and God promises to open up a new and good way before you!

When we gather today celebrating Father's Day we also remember what has been happening during the last weeks. Every day we get many news about children all over the world who suffer because they do not have any father or because their father is not able to care for them. We see the films and photos about war, strife and natural disasters, about hunger, unemployment, horrifying illnesses that afflict so many families and children.

But today, we especially remember June 11, Wednesday, when Prime Minister Steven Harper delivered a historical speech as he apologized for all unjust and inhumane treatment of children and families through the Indian Residential Schools. Literally Harper said, "we are sorry ... for the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities".

We have heard tragic and appalling accounts of what was done to children and families and this in coaction of government and churches over many decades. It was an urgent step to apologize for this injustice, and it was absolutely necessary that representatives of the churches were present at this act too.

Here churches took over the responsibility of education and guardianship, and in many cases misused it. The Indian Residential Schools are not the only terrible story in North America, many times we heard about pedophile priests who misused their authority, and churches which face tremendously huge obligations of recompensation. All this means the heavy burden of historical guilt and it means a future obligation for each church to never again misuse this kind of responsibility; to exercise utmost care and diligence wherever we in the church are given responsibility for children and young people.

But let us consider some other worrying news of the last week.

World military spending grew 45 percent in the past decade, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said Monday. In 2007, 1,339 billion dollars was spent on arms and other military expenditure, corresponding to 2.5 percent of global gross domestic product, or 202 dollars for each of the world's 6.6 billion people.

The United States spends by far the most towards military aims, dishing out 547 billion dollars last year, or 45 percent of global expenditure. Britain, China, France and Japan, the next in line of big spenders, account for four to five percent of world military costs each.

The increase is both "excessive and obscene," Jayantha Dhanapala, a SIPRI member formerly in charge of disarmament affairs at the United Nations, told reporters. Germany is ranking sixth, having spent 36.9 billions of Dollars, which is more than Russia, 35.4 billions. "By 2007, US spending was higher than at any time since World War II," the SIPRI report said.

This is the most shocking tragedy of our times, that the last decade, which still could have seen the fruits of the end of cold war and east west conflict, actually has been a period of terrifying rearmament.

What tremendous change could have been achieved in the poor countries of this world, if these finances had been used for development of medical supplies, of educational and commercial infrastructure, of civil societies.

The apology of June 11 is an important step to national healing and reconciliation in Canada. But there is an even bigger challenge: to promote international disarmament and global healing and development. This would be taking on the responsibility of stewardship for humankind and creation. At the moment, I don't see many signs that this is done in any way or degree.

But let us return to the sphere of responsibility in our families, our obligations as parents and children, as relatives and friends. There is a saying: "Other books were given for or information. The Bible was given for our transformation." This is absolutely true.

And I read again these verses from Ephesians 3:

14For this reason I bow my knees before God the Father, who is the true father for all who are called children in heaven and in earth. 16I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, 17and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

This paragraph emphasizes: If we recognize our responsibility in these spheres of parenthood, education, mutual care in our families and relationships, the only way is to become rooted and grounded in love.

So let me tell you a little story about this.

Once upon a time, a great tree grew. It was lovely to look at, strong and stately, but the tree was special, and it knew it was losing strength and getting old. "Perhaps", thought the tree, "if I grow another branch, I won't creak so much when the wind blows." So it stretched and stretched and grew another branch. People came by and admired the big and stately tree.

One winter, there was a great gale. As the wind pulled on its branches, the tree began to groan and then heard a great cracking as its roots snapped from the strain. Suddenly the great tree began to fall. But then just as suddenly the fall stopped. The tree next to it had caught the falling tree in its branches!

"Thank you", the stately tree whispered to its neighbour. "How did you do this?", it asked, "why didn't you fall too?" "I didn't fall", said the strong oak, "because when you were reaching out with your branches, I was reaching down with my roots, making them greater and stronger."

This also is the advice of our Bible paragraph today. Reach down with your roots. Do not reach out with your branches only, trying to get more, see more, have more for your life! But reach down with your roots.

Care for this, make this your first concern, that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through God's Spirit, 17and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

The love of Christ is good ground and fertile soil for our lives. Daily prayer to God our heavenly Father is the way to get strength for our every day work. Asking God that his Holy Spirit may touch us, strengthen us, transform us is the way of experiencing God's guidance and help in our lives. And so our lives receive divine strength and light, so our lives are rooted and grounded in God's love which is much greater than ours can ever be. Amen.