

## Pastor Roy's sermon from June 16, 2013

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Children's lesson. Honor your Father and Mother. Story of the car accident. My father is kind and I honor him today.

Our lessons today give pointers to fathers for strong faith: Humble gratitude builds faith strong.

Let's look at David first. From early on, mercy was central to Israel's faith. Remember, Abraham settled among strangers as a sojourner and later Moses led Israel out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land where they could live generously. Kindness toward the poor and faithfulness to neighbors and strangers meant that even kings could not claim special privileges for building power and wealth. Israel wanted a shepherd king: Strong, but gentle. In time, David became the standard by which every other king in Israel and Judah would be judged.

But not even David was able to live up to his own standard. He started out with great passion and energy for justice and humbly loved his God. He trusted, he praised, he was grateful. But with time, he became dull, complacent, and began to take moral shortcuts. He began to think he deserved to be legislator, judge, and executive in the land. Further, the people had come to respect the deep spirituality which he was rumored to have. But now new rumors were circulating. Was David falling on hard times?

Indeed, he was in danger of losing his spiritual foundation. In his mind he had half convinced himself that he deserved special privileges as king. Was his relationship with Bathsheba really adultery? It all seemed so comfortable and it seemed agreeable for both David and Bathsheba. . . .And if he gave a secret order, and then this happened and then that, and if his lover's husband--one of David's faithful commanders--happened to die in the process, was it anything more than a tragic consequence of the need to keep the borders safe? Surely not murder!?! David loved Uriah! He was a good man! Of course, in time he began to think more about Uriah's wife than he thought about loyalty to him as a warrior and comrade. According to the story, for months David kept trying to tell himself that. But it just wasn't working.

Then comes the truth telling prophet Nathan who confronts David and gives him the courage to admit his greed and arrogance so that he can begin to reawaken. He feels the keen edge of God's judgment-- "You are the man!" and, then as always, mercy-- "The Lord has put away your sin, you shall not die."

But more important than the details of the story, David rediscovers that all is a gift of God. He rediscovers humble gratitude. He lets go of his feelings of entitlement which poorly covered up his greedy violence. He repents. He rededicates himself to the daily practice of humble, grateful service.

The same challenge lies before each of us. Humility requires patience. Humility sets aside the impulse to get what we want, when we want it. For us to be grateful, we must consider our blessings as pure gift. The gifts of God surround us each day. As we age, we have plenty of chances to choose to be humbly grateful. The choice is always before us. The small choices we make determine the fabric of our lives, our mental habits which form us.

The second example for fathers (and all) is the comparison between Simon the Pharisee and the poor

woman who had the bad reputation. Simon as a religious leader came to believe that he was righteous and others were sinners. The woman who anointed Jesus was probably poor and quite vulnerable. Jesus had shown her mercy and she loved him in return. In contrast, Simon despised her. In his world people had value based on how they fit into the system which he and his social order had created. He helped write and enforce the religious rules and they gave him power which he abused.

Was *he* grateful? . . . Maybe that he wasn't despicable like the poor woman who had to depend on desperate means to survive... But he didn't need to be grateful in *his* world because he didn't owe anyone anything. He didn't need mercy. He didn't need help. He was ok just as he was. He lived in an illusion. He did not have a healthy spirituality. He did not humbly walk with God.

And therein lies his problem. He doesn't see his need. In a sense, in his world, God needs him and his kind. He is God's gift to the world.

But in reality, Simon is no different than the poor woman. He has just as much need for mercy and should be as grateful to God as she is. If he were focused on gratitude for God's mercy rather than trying to convince himself and everyone around him that he is better than the next guy, he would be in a much better place.

Perhaps Simon, like David, began his journey into humble gratitude because of the honest words of a prophet--Jesus, Son of man, Son of God.

How is your journey into humble gratitude? Have you discovered the joy of free mercy which is available to all who are open to the amazing freedom of God's love? A freedom which has no favorites, where mercy is always available, the possibility of a new day, a new opportunity to learn the secret of humble gratitude.

Sometimes we're tempted to think greatness lies in being like Simon the Pharisee or David before Nathan caught up to him. But here is a gift every father can give his child. Here is gift each of us can give one another. The practice of humble gratitude given and received.

May we discipline ourselves daily to practice this deep spirituality which is so life giving and wise. Let us remember the humbled David and the woman who freely showed her gratitude to Jesus.

Amen.