

Father's Day / Joint Sermon

June 15, 2003

“FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN THE BIBLE...”

**“Talitha cumi, little girl, say to you ‘arise.’” Mark 5:41, Matthew 9:18-26,
Mark 5:21-43, Luke 8:4-56**

It doesn't get any better than this! If you are a father and a preacher, what could make you happier than celebrating your day of honor by sharing the sermon of the morning with your minister daughter, especially one so nice as Courtney? I thank Dr. McCormick for the invitation to be here today. I thank Kevin Bogan for his excellence in music and for his commitment to Christ and His church. We send our love and prayers to you, Kevin, as you soon head out to a new location to serve the Lord.

I also want to thank those of you here in Boca Raton, who have welcomed, loved, encouraged and supported our Courtney in her life and ministry. Her mother and I appreciate it. Please continue to do so.

Our sermon topic was almost automatic: “Fathers and daughters in the Bible.” On first thought, unless you happen to be an experienced Biblical scholar, you might be surprised to know how many times the Scriptures share stories of fathers and their daughters. It seems to be a man's book.

The Bible was largely written in a Patriarchal society, i.e., when men ruled the home and nation (“So what else is new?”, some of you might be asking.) But, even though much of the Scripture is the story of fathers and their sons doing this and that, and not very well at times; if you look closely, there are a myriad of occasions when fathers and their daughters come to the fore. We want to tell you a little about a few of those and draw some moral and spiritual power for the living of your days.

(Reverend Courtney Cromie)

The Bible is much more son oriented than daughter oriented. But there is more about daughters than we realize. Believe it or not, there are about 500 references to daughters in the Bible, and about 90 of them are in Genesis. Most of Genesis is about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons. Abraham had just two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Then Isaac had his two boys, Jacob and Esau. Then Jacob had the twelve sons from two wives, ten by Leah, two by Rachel. Leah finally came through with a daughter named Dinah.

She is the only daughter we know of for three generations in that family tree. Abraham's brother, Nahor, had an abundance of daughters, including Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah.

The thing that surprised me in studying the families of Genesis is that many of them had just two children...you discover that families with one to five children are the majority, and two or three are very common. Part of the explanation is that daughters are often not listed, the family tree followed the sons.

There are several prominent daughters in the Old Testament which we do not have time to mention. E.g., Jethro/Ruel had a daughter, Zipporah, who married Moses. In Job's daughters, there were "daughters" born to several of them. God was accomplishing his purpose. They were killed at first in a storm and fire, but at the end they were restored, and they were the fairest daughters in all the land.

I. Jacob and his daughter

I want to share with you the story of Jacob and his daughter. Dinah was the daughter of Jacob and Leah, the first girl in a long series of sons. It is an interesting story of a young woman who was taken by force, raped, and then her family members took revenge.

The Red Tent is essentially a fictional expansion of the Biblical account of Dinah, Jacob's only daughter. In the Bible, she appears with a brief mention only. After being raped by Shechem, a foreigner to Jacob's people, her honor was avenged through a complex plot hatched by her brothers Simon and Levi. After this episode, the Bible never mentions Dinah's name again. The Red Tent tells a fictionalized version of the story – from Dinah's perspective – and goes on to describe what became of her. The name Dinah means "justice" or "one who judges". (Genesis 30:21)

There is a similar story later on with Tamar who was David's daughter. Amnon, her half brother, took her by force and raped her in the palace. A similar response came from her brother.

(Dr. Richard Cromie)

II. Deborah and her father

When Courtney was ordained six and one half years ago, she invited me to preach her ordination sermon. I was pleased. The topic I chose was "Deborah, Prophet, Priest, Warrior, Woman!" Wow!

Back at the time of the Judges, say 1,100 B.C. or so, God's chosen people were still conquering the Promised Land. All kinds of enemies occupied the land when they got there. It was a day when rugged, strong men of God were called upon to win courageous battles for His people. You have heard about Gideon and Samson and Barak and the

others who served as warriors for the Lord. Some of them are listed in the Roll Call of the Heroes of the Faith in the book of Hebrews. (Hebrews 11) They were tough, even ruthless at times. The times were too.

But in Judges four and five, all of a sudden a woman turns up. “Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at the time. She used to sit under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came to her for advice.” (Judges 4:4-6) One of the men who came was Barak, a General. She instructed him how to win the battle over Sisera, the General of Jabin’s army, the enemy.

Barak refused to go, “Unless you Deborah, go with me.” So she went. And “the Lord delivered Sisera into the hand of a woman.” She gave courage to Barak. The whole army of Sisera was lost in the ensuing battle, all because of a woman.

I told Courtney, half a dozen years ago when she was ordained: “Be a Prophet, for we all need to hear the word of God. Be a Priest, for we all need a blessing and your prayers. Be a Warrior, for the earth is filled with those who do not love and honor Christ. Be a Warrior against the Devil. But, also, be a Woman. Bring your grace and skills and loveliness to the ministry. And everything is going to be O.K.”

III. Jephthah and his daughter

This is one of the most puzzling stories in the Bible and the most troublesome of our choices today. So naturally my darling little Courtney assigned it to me.

Jephthah was a Gileadite and a mighty warrior at the time of the Judges, say 1,100 B.C. The story is told in great detail in chapter 11. But it is not fun to read. In fact Elie Wiesel in his book Sages and Dreamers writes: “This story is so frightening I wish it could be erased from Scripture...it is a story fraught with inescapable despair.” (Sages and Dreamers, p. 35)

The land was corrupt at the time, and the enemies of Israel were harsh and plentiful, especially in this case, the Ammonites. Jephthah had been exiled over to the land of Tob where he wiled away his time with what the Bible bluntly calls “worthless fellows.” But he was strong and courageous and a mighty warrior. When trouble came and God’s chosen people were in danger, the elders of the land went out and asked Jephthah to be their ruler and judge. It did not matter what his moral fiber was, he could fight! Under his leadership the Israelites had many victories, and it adds curiously “The spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah.” (11:29)

When his army came to do battle against the Ammonites, Jephthah was unsure of himself and he made a vow to the Lord: “If you give me victory in this battle, when I get home, the first person who comes from the door of my house I will offer him up to you as a burnt offering.” A very strange vow, but not entirely uncommon in the days of long ago. The Delphic Oracle, e.g., advised a warrior who came for advice, to do the same. Cicero

writes that Agamemnon promised Diana that he would sacrifice the most beautiful creature in the kingdom, if he won his battle. Sadly for him, his daughter, Iphigenia, was chosen. The King of Crete was involved in a similar situation. Frankly I am not sure if what we have in Judges 11 is borrowed from one of those pagan stories, and inserted here for the dramatic effect of the faithfulness of a warrior to his God. It could be.

But anyway, you have probably guessed it by now, I can barely repeat the words, “When Jephthah came home, his own little daughter came running out to meet him dancing and singing.” (Court, when she was young, used to do that when I came home from work.) Upon which the mighty warrior broke into tears, murmuring and muttering to her that he had made a vow to God and could not take it back.

Hey Jephthah! What are you talking about? There was a way to turn it around. The High Priest could give you permission to take back a vow, or you could have done what any loving father would do, refuse! His daughter, on the other hand, accepted the situation. She asked only for some time to go off in the country with her girlfriends for a while. She did. When she came back, it was over.

How could he have allowed it to happen? Not so much the sacrifice, but how could he have made something else more important than his own daughter? The man is crazy who does that. (Are you listening?) The father who does not put his children and family first does not deserve to have them.

Some people try to excuse Jephthah. The Bible tells you that he had a horrible childhood. He was a step child, entirely unloved, abused. When the natural children of his father Gilead and Gilead’s new wife grew up, they tossed Jephthah out of the house. His father never once came to see him. Sure he was an abused child; but where does it say that that gives a man the right to abuse or ignore his own children? No where! If he needs help, get it, but no excuses, please! We make excuses in our day for practically anyone and everyone.

What moral could we possibly take from this story? Fathers, be careful. Be careful. Be especially careful of the words you say and the promises you make to your children. Be true to the man you say you are; love your children. God does not want you to sacrifice time and love away from your children. Your own thing is important to you whatever that is, but no vow you make anywhere else supercedes the one you make to take care of your family.

The final mistake Jephthah made was that he did not trust his daughter. He did not take her into his confidence. If he had made a stupid vow to achieve his military victory, he should have told her about it. He should have advised her to stay in the house and not come out until, or whatever. He should have shared his life and plans with her. She was worth it. Too bad he didn’t know it.

IV. The Father of Mary and Martha

They were sisters, Mary and Martha, from the little town of Bethany where they lived in a house, owned by Martha. Lazarus their brother, also lived there, the one who later became famous when Jesus raised him from the dead.

People always talk about the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which begins, “a certain man had two sons”, and the sons were different. The one was a free spirit. He loved the good times. He didn’t like working on the family farm. He took his trust fund and ran off and wasted it all on “riotous living.”

His Elder brother meanwhile remained at home. He worked the farm. He seldom relaxed. He took care of his father. He was as “responsible” as his kid brother was “frivolous”. When the younger brother came home and his father was happy to see him, the big brother got angry. He told his father that the little squirt was the Dad’s favorite and he was not worth a nickel. Meanwhile, he, the big brother, had been faithful all the while and nobody ever threw a party for him.

We think of those two sons and how different they were. We usually forget that there are also two daughters in the New Testament. “A certain man had two daughters, too.” And they were different, Mary and Martha. There are three occasions in the Gospels where they appear; the first in Luke 10. “Jesus entered a village” (Bethany is not named in Luke) and “a woman named Martha received him into her house.” She had a sister living with her whose name was Mary. When Jesus came, Mary sat down at his feet (which women of the day did not normally do. Only men were invited to sit at the Rabbi’s feet.) But what did Mary care about rules? She was captivated by the Savior.

Then it says, “Martha was distracted with preparing the meal and busy with much serving.” She pleaded with Jesus “Lord, do you not care that my sister isn’t helping me? Tell her to get and help me set the table.” Jesus said “No Martha, you are anxious about many things. Mary has chosen to talk and listen to me. That’s a good thing.”

Mary and Martha were sisters. The certain man who was their father was always puzzled, amazed, at how different they were. Same parents, same genes, same house, same environment, same schools, same friends, same synagogue, and they were different! He couldn’t believe it!

(Reverend Courtney Cromie)

The second time we meet the sisters is in John 11. Lazarus, their brother, had taken ill. The sisters sent for Jesus. He was delayed. In that time Lazarus died. Martha went out to meet the Lord: “If you had been here,” she said “our brother would not have died.” Mary, when she finally came out, said the same thing, falling at his feet! Until Martha called her though, Mary sat alone in the house, desolate in her grief, I guess, not knowing what to do. She was emotional, a little afraid of life and death. She was anxious to learn new things but I think she lacked a certain confidence. She didn’t like

housework. Martha already knew everything she needed to know. Her faith was secure. Her willingness to help was always at the ready.

(Dr. Richard Cromie)

The third time we see the sisters is in John 12. It was six days before the Passover. Again Martha was serving supper, this time at the lavish home of Simon the leper. (It could be that Simon was her husband or that she was his widow.) Meanwhile, little Mary came strolling along, carrying a pound of costly ointment, perfume, “pure nard” it says. Then she poured it all over the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet dry with her hair. Wow! Judas Iscariot complained that the ointment could have been sold to help the poor. Jesus cautioned, “The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me!” No, you won’t.

Be careful. Jesus loved them both. And they both loved Jesus. There was room in the Savior’s heart for different people, for everyone. He did not condemn Martha, because, like the elder son, he knew that without those who plan and work and get things done, the younger brother would have had no farm to come back to; and Mary would have had no home to sit and talk in. After all the Bible says it was Martha’s house?

I close with an old fashioned poem:

“Lord of all pots and pans and things.

Since I’ve no time to be

A saint by doing lovely things,

Or watching late with thee

Or dreaming in the dawn light,

Or storming heaven’s gates,

Make me a saint by getting meals

And washing up the plates!”

Amen.

Their poor father did not understand how they could be so different.

(Reverend Courtney Cromie)

V. Laban and his daughters

Laban also had two daughters: Leah and Rachel. The name Rachel means “ewe”, and Leah means “cow”. It says that Leah had “weak eyes”, while Rachel was beautiful. (Genesis 29:17) They lived in the days of the Patriarchs, dated anywhere from the 18th century B.C. to the 14th century B.C. They lived in Haran in Paddan Aram. Later, they moved to Canaan. Poor Rachel died in childbirth on the way to Bethel. Jacob was devastated. They were Aramaeans, people of Semitic origin from Shem. They populated regions of Mesopotamia and Syria.

Their father Laban was the brother of Rebekah (Isaac’s wife.) He was a man who practiced divination (Genesis 30:27); he kept idols in his home (Genesis 31:30); he acknowledged the existence of the one true Creator, but he did not honor Him as God. (Genesis 31:53)

Leah was a believer in the Lord our God. God gave her children, some said, to compensate for being unloved. (Genesis 29:31) (Jacob preferred Rachel.) She named her children names that spoke about God’s working in answer to her petitions.

Rachel also was a believer although she made many mistakes. When she was barren, she demanded that Jacob give her children. (Genesis 30:1) She resorted to using mandrake plants as a fertility drug. (Genesis 30:14, 15) She stole idols from her father’s house and took them with her when the family left Laban’s camp. (Genesis 31:19,34) Then she lied to and deceived her father to try to conceal her theft. (Genesis 31:34, 35)

Later, when all that was settled, Rachel prayed for a son and God answered her. (Genesis 30:22) When she became pregnant, she acknowledged that God had provided for her. They named her first son Joseph, “God shall add.” She said “May the Lord add to me another son.” (Genesis 30:22-24) He did, Benjamin.

Jacob was deeply in love with Rachel. She was “lovely in form and beautiful.” (Genesis 29:17) Jacob said to Laban, “I will work for you seven years as a ‘dowry’ for Rachel.” Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, then seven more...but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. Laban gave the customary wedding feast but when the party was over, he delivered Leah to Jacob’s tent, instead of Rachel. (Genesis 29:22-24) She was heavily veiled, as was the custom of the day and Jacob thought that it was Rachel under all that lace. It really was Leah.

Why did Laban do such a thing? It may have been customary to have the older daughter marry before the younger, as Laban claimed. (Genesis 29:26) Or it may have been

Laban's opportunity to get unattractive Leah a husband. Jacob later married Rachel. (Genesis 29:27-30) Laban proposed to let Jacob have Rachel as a wife, at the end of Leah's bridal week, in exchange for another seven year's work.

The sisters competed for Jacob's attention. Leah felt she had to earn Jacob's love. She hoped that bearing children would win it for her. Rachel feared she would lose Jacob's favor. She knew Jacob loved her, but she was jealous of and threatened by Leah's fertility. (Genesis 30:1) She had provoked Jacob's anger by her jealousy. She saw herself in a struggle with her sister.

But, both were loyal to Jacob. They agreed to journey away with Jacob, leaving their father and their family home in Haran. They acknowledged that they were no longer loyal to their father because he treated them like foreigners, and not like his daughters. They had never received a portion of their dowries from their father. He had, in fact, spent their shares. (Genesis 31:15) They told Jacob they were loyal to him and would support him in his decisions, "whatever God has told you." Rachel tried to insure a blessing on Jacob by stealing her father's household idols and bringing them into their camp. Leah and Rachel were responsible for the formation of the twelve tribes of Israel because between them they had gave birth to Jacob's twelve sons.

God takes the weak, as He did with Leah and Rachel's efforts to build their families. He rewarded the patient and steadfast devotion of Leah by making two of the most important tribes of Israel come from her: Levi, the priestly tribe, and Judah, the tribe from whom our Lord Jesus descended. While Rachel died young, she was rewarded by being the mother of Joseph who became the Prime Minister of Egypt, as well as Benjamin.

(Dr. Richard Cromie)

VI. Jairus and his daughter

The story of Jairus and his daughter is wonderfully told in Matthew, Mark and Luke. In Matthew he is not named. There it says "A ruler came in and told Jesus his twelve year old daughter had died." That's sad. When you bury a parent you lose the past. When you bury a child, you lose the future.

In both Luke and Mark, by the way, the little girl was still alive when Jairus came to Jesus, even if her father said "She was at the point of death." "Come lay your hands on her," Jairus pleaded, "that she may be made well and live." What faith!

At that point (In Luke and Mark) a man came and told Jairus that the little girl had died and there was no point in bothering Jesus any longer. Jesus objected: "Do not fear only believe." And, making his way to the ruler's house, he found family and friends weeping and wailing. He told them to cease, adding "She is not dead but sleeping." That sounded so ridiculous, it says, that "they laughed at him." But, Jesus went into the house, took her by the hand and said in Aramaic "Talitha Cumi", which means "little girl arise". And immediately, it says, "her spirit got up and she walked away." A miracle.

“Talitha cumi”, try to remember those precious words, my friends. Say them anytime your child is in trouble, especially when he or she is seriously ill. Or if your child is down, worried, lost, emotionally bewildered, depressed. Memorize these words, “talitha cumi”. Let them be your prayer night and day. “O God, be pleased to touch my child.” Talitha cumi, let her/him arise. Help my child to get back up. That’s my job as father and mother. Trust the Lord and turn them over to His love and care. Jairus knew enough to do exactly that – A good father.

And if (whisper it) in the time and providence of God, the awful day should come when out of sequence, the Lord should call your little loved one home, call up the Aramaic words again; whisper them through your tears and fears. “Talitha cumi”...little one arise. And I guarantee you, as sure as I am standing here before you, that Christ will hear your cry. He will answer your prayer and plea; the child will arise.

I cannot guarantee that the little child who leaves you will rise up and come back to earth to walk around your house, but like Emily did in Our Town or little Susie Salmon in Lovely Bones, he/she will be looking in on you with pride, walking with you on your daily rounds.

And, the day will come, in God’s time, not our own, when we will all be together again and stay together. I can guarantee that to you in Christ Jesus. Then fathers and their daughters can sit down under a lovely palm tree in heaven, over by the lake, and talk and laugh and love for a million years or more. Eternal is a long, long time. It means for now and forevermore. Amen.

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