

**Living the Father's Love:** sermon, 10 Feb 2013, Milson  
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Bible readings:

Luke 10:21-28

2 John 1:6

Our theme for today has got me thinking about my own Dad, and I fished out his autobiography. He loved to write, and it is a great gift he has left his family with this record of who he was and the milestones of his life. Ernest Arthur Crane, Ern for short, Ernie to his friends was born in 1915, to a Danish mother and English father, both who had come to NZ as children with their families in the 1880s. Born in Wairoa, first his father, then his mother died, and he moved at 15 into the care of his grandmother just up the road here in Bunnythorp & went to Boys High and Bible Class. He records his decision to follow Christ, just after his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.

"I did want to love Jesus as the Friend of my life so I signed the commitment card. And though that love has varied in intensity, its flame either burning low, or flickering at times almost to extinction in the winds of opposition and doubt, it has remained the guiding force of my life ever since. It has led me into wonderful avenues of service. It has led me to persecution and imprisonment; but it has been the inspiration of my lay preaching for over 50 years."

My father lived another 65 years, and God's call on him was lived out ... through his work as a teacher, often in places few others wanted to go, Ruatoria, Tonga ... through his dedication to peace as an inevitable outworking of this friendship with Jesus, which saw him imprisoned and persecuted ... through his love for women (only one at a time!) and children (5 of his own plus countless others he taught & grandparented) ... through his love of sport and exploring and picnics and travel and adventures ... through his writing and thinking and preaching, through which he sought always for integrity and truth, even if this clashed with traditions and others convictions.

He was a short man, dynamic, heaps of energy, rarely sitting still for long, up early. He was impatient with weakness, better at talking than listening, often infuriating to live with. He was deeply confused by my mother's inability to live with him anymore when I was just 11, hurt and shaken. He was 65 and he suddenly became an old man ... for a while, before picking himself up and starting over again in his 70s, marrying an English woman, travelling and teaching some more, then after she died marrying for a 4<sup>th</sup> time!

Ern was a good man, a faithful man who lived and loved as best he could with vigour and integrity. My father.

As a young woman, tho, it wasn't easy to relate to him. And it wasn't easy to relate to God as Father. And there were people around me saying that Father was too masculine. God was Mother and Father, creator. 'Father' was just a metaphor, I was taught. God is beyond all our names and labels. It's only been in more recent years that I have come to appreciate better who my own father was, and heal broken memories. And as I trained to be a Minister it was put to me really for the first time coherently and passionately that our God really IS Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These are not just labels or metaphors, they are the central ways in which God himself chooses to be known. Our God is the Father of Jesus Christ, made available to us through his Spirit.

And we just kind of take it for granted, don't we. We say the 'Our Father', we address prayers to our heavenly father ...  
like the shortest grace ever. Do you know it?  
Heavenly Pa, ta!

But it's not obvious at all, really, you know.

The Old Testament does not commonly refer to God as Father.

The name of God is the unpronounceable Name, written simply as four consonants, JHWH. Yahweh. Jehovah. The name that is not a name, that is a statement of BEING, "I am". When you see in your Bibles the word "LORD" written in capitals that is what is translating this Hebrew name.

And of course scripture gives us lots of other names, take the Psalms for example ... You are my rock. The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my light and my salvation. The Lord of hosts, the King of glory.

A God of steadfast love and compassion, a God of all creation, certainly. But Father? Not so much. Remember that the gods of the pagan world were fathers and husbands and mothers and lovers, the Jewish people knew that their God, one lord of Heaven and Earth, was above all that. Their God was

Immortal, invisible, God only wise  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes.

So what happened? How did God become Father?

The answer is obvious, by sending his Son.

One God, yet mysteriously also eternally wrapped in relationship, Father and Son. And the Spirit wrapping them around, the love flowing eternally from Father to Son and Son to Father.

But it was only when this cosy intimacy was interrupted that this love and power was able to include us ordinary human beings.

For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son

And some of the loveliest passages in scripture are when Jesus puts this utterly magnificent relationship into simple words for us. Like this passage from Luke 10

22

... those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him

For this is Jesus, not just a role model or hero. Jesus Christ was the one and only link point, the one and only person who knew God through and through, and in Christ God was revealed as Father

But what kind of Father? To be perfectly honest, sometimes it seems like the whole Father thing has caused nearly as much pain and alienation as it has intimacy and worship. There is so much that can get in the way of our participation in the love of the Father for the Son and Son for the Father. Oh if only we could know God the way Jesus knew God. Instead we put up barriers, obstacles from our own pain. We throw masks onto the face of the Father, masks that look like our own Dads, or their Dads, or our teachers or earthly rulers. We stick onto his face a big white beard and a disapproving glare like a grumpy man in a Santa suit. We turn and run from him, confident in his power to reject us, just like we have already been rejected again and again. Rejected, judged, criticized, controlled, ignored.

For many people, it's like, Jesus we can relate to. What a friend we have in Jesus!! And the Holy Spirit gives good gifts, gives comfort and life. Great, bring it on!

But the Father? Maybe we'll just leave him on his high and mighty throne, dozing on his lazyboy while we get on with things down here in the real world.

Can I ask you to do some work now?

I'm going to shut up for a minute. I'm going to ask you to close your eyes and ask yourself,

How do you see God? When someone says 'Heavenly Father' what comes to mind? How do I honestly feel about God the Father? What masks is he wearing? What emotion shows on his face? How does God the Father feel about me?

What pictures come to mind? Where is your Father God? close or far, up high? down low? alone? is he doing anything? saying anything? going anywhere?

...

What do you want to say or do?

Our Father in Heaven, holy is your name  
we confess to you that we have distorted your name,  
marred your image as our true Father  
pushed you away in fear and pain.  
And we invite you to show your true face to us  
so that we may know you only in the way that Jesus knew you  
as his Father, his Dad, the source of all love, all grace, all mercy  
the Father who runs towards us arms outstretched  
in welcome and forgiveness.

...

And now, I ask you please to close the eyes of your heart to all the pictures  
and words that came to mind  
and just rest a moment, eyes closed, mind empty, waiting.  
And as you rest there, feel a presence standing behind you, the presence of  
pure love  
and feel strong hands rest gently on your shoulders  
and hear God say your name, softly so softly  
as your Father says to you  
**You are my beloved child**  
**I treasure you just as you are**  
**for I made you**  
**for my love.**

I think I'm about done with this sermon. I'm going to put some music on  
now and leave you to worship this amazing God who adores you, to rest in  
his arms, to let him teach you again how to trust him.

And after that we will sing again and bring our gifts to his table for  
Communion, as we take up the offering.